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Demystifying Ideology:

Identity, Gender and Politics in Kashmir

Hameeda Nayeem

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Preface

The present book is addressed to all those who refuse to be silenced and do not abdicate the human prerogative to resist. As a teacher of postcolonial literature, I have first-hand experience of the pain that comes up while engaging with young minds who are yet not cowed by age to dream big, to fight and to hope for the freer and more humane world. I believe we have only two options in Kashmir- to watch or to act. The present book is a product of the second choice that the author took long back seeing the brutal face of the power in action.

I have no sermons to make. Neither am I taking some ideological position. I simply record my pain and my response to emerging issues that necessitated some immediate response.

I have been engaging with a soul searching issue of what it means to be a conscious Kashmiri today and how to integrate my identity with the larger self of Kashmir. All these pieces are meditations on the question of identity- what it means to be a Kashmiri today, to be a woman in Kashmir and nonconformist scholarly activist.

The Problem of Kashmir remains a problem of our identity and search for a definition and individuation, in short for selfhood. Thus seen the present book is existential as well as socio-political commentary.

Unite, In Humanity (May 11, 2006)

Hameeda Nayeem

Over the past two weeks as the case of sexual abuse of Kashmiri girls has stirred sustained protest, I, like everyone else in Kashmir, have been deeply disturbed about the sordid state of affairs highlighted by the entire episode. But at the same time I also feel reassured when people come out on the streets in large numbers to protest the abuse. It has after all been a long time since Kashmiris protested so vehemently against an undesirable development. There was a catharsis, an outburst of pent-up anger against a system that is generally seen to be fighting against the entire society in the name of fighting against militancy. It is a confirmation that Kashmir is still alive.

But what is it about this scandal that has so agitated the masses and sizzled the streets of Kashmir? As a woman I think there can be no greater disaster for a woman than to lose her chastity through coercion. Her entire being is disintegrated and depersonalized. But the way the scandal is being now projected, there seems to be a concerted covert effort to shift the debate away from the real issue. The issue here is not about the morality or waywardness of the girls. For that matter, it is not even about a particular sex racket.

This sex abuse scandal is about the involvement and connivance of the entire state apparatus, the coercion, the use of drugs to push teenage girls into prostitution, to turn them into comfort women of politicians and police and security agency officers by lure and black-mail. The details that have so far come to light, both in the media and outside it, point unequivocally towards a policy-based

state patronage. This is deeply disturbing. More so, in a distressed setting called Kashmir, whose lanes and by-lanes have been witness to the bloody cycle of an unremitting conflict over the past sixteen years.

In Kashmir, India is fighting not only a war with militants but also a battle to win the hearts and minds of the people. How do you help this situation when you undermine the very confidence of the people in the state apparatus? When the state itself, which is otherwise expected to dispense justice, is seen to be poaching upon a woman's basic right to honour and dignity. It is here that the real problem lies. And here is an explanation of the intense public outrage that has so boiled the socio-political landscape of the Valley over the past two weeks.

This casts a huge responsibility on the central as well as state governments. Given the magnitude of public anger, the scandal has become a test case for the credibility of the system presiding over Kashmir. A transparent probe may be necessary not only to weed out the black sheep in the establishment but also to re-establish the people's shaken confidence in the system.

But the way the case has so far played out on the ground and the way it has been responded to at the official level leave a lot to be desired. Far from a demonstrative effort to proceed against the guilty, the state seems to be putting down the entire scandal to the "immorality and waywardness" of the society. This amounts to nothing less than blaming the victims for the crimes perpetrated against them. And ironically, in this campaign even some 'separatist' parties are playing along with the government. One women's group has taken out raucous protests in the streets of Srinagar, seeking to identify the scandal as part of the moral degradation of Kashmiri society. This gives a

bad name to the women of Kashmir –unwarrantedly, where sex rackets have otherwise traditionally been a rare occurrence. This above all, absolves the state apparatus that has blatantly misused power.

But while the state apparatus deserves to be criticized for misrepresenting the entire episode and its 'out of context' interpretation, there is a lot to be said about the larger Indian civil society as well. Where are the women's groups, women's commissions, the NGOs across India which champion the cause of women's rights? If Jessica Lal's murder and its subsequent trial becomes a national issue – and duly so – why doesn't an organized, officially sanctioned abuse of Kashmiri girls elicit a single statement from anywhere across India? The argument that Kashmir is an integral part of India cannot be used only for political convenience. There is a need to relate it to the people of Kashmir and their tragedies too.

Kashmir may be the most politicized state but the tragedies as they are experienced at the people's level are not political. There are already some weird attempts by the state government to brand the entire public response to the scandal as a disguised expression of fanatic religious zeal. There are attempts to blame the girls in the racket as responsible for what happened to them. There are also attempts to dub the scandal as the handiwork of "anti-national agencies" to discredit the police and the state government.

This is nothing but the prostitution of the entire issue. And this would do no good to the public confidence in the system, which should be paramount, both for the state and the central government. In the present scheme of things, it would be in the best interest of the government as well as resistance force to keep the larger politics

of Kashmir out of the scandal. Let us, for once, throw the space open to people. And let us, for once, answer directly to them, rather than find excuses in the polarized politics of Kashmir.

The Butcher from Within (May 16, 2006)

While I like everyone else, am deeply disturbed and agonized by the revelation of the sexual abuse of teenage girls by none other than those who inhabit the corridors of power and security – by both the law-making and law-enforcing agencies, I am also shocked and offended by the confused response of some people to the whole scandal. That the “custodians” of society on the seats of power have colonized the bodies of teenage girls and visited these sites at will to violate their wombs (an 8th class drop out drugged and raped by dozens of men according to some reports) is intolerable to thought and odious to the soul.

I shudder to use these words but use I must for there is no other way to bring home the point to those who have fallen prey to the concerted effort of the sex coterie who are glossing over the whole issue by shifting the blame on the loose morals and so-called promiscuity and growing obscenity in our society. This is testified to by the circulation of the list of abused girls by the sex coterie to defame the girls and absolve themselves of the heinous crimes. Such people even though well-meaning, are unwittingly exonerating the criminals and putting the blame of their stinking crimes on the slender shoulders of the poor hapless teenage victims. Nothing could be farther from jus-

tice and nothing could be more withering to one's belief in a system that has been parroting of healing the wounds of Kashmiris for the past few years. The confused response is also demonstrative of an ossified patriarchal mindset which derives its nourishment from a never fully articulated invisible system of assumptions by which a society operates and by which a woman is considered inferior precisely by virtue of her sexuality. The healing touch shouters were only performing the "sacred duty" of serving the patriarchal state by keeping their coalition government in one piece when they hushed up the entire macabre matter in 2004. Needless to say that in Kashmir every sordid story is brushed aside under the pretext of "larger national interest." State machinery is seen as helping India to keep her hold on Kashmir and therefore the collaborators are beyond and above any probe, investigation or accountability for the misuse of their power and state machinery. Narsimha Roa's 'infamous' statement in the Indian parliament in response to some sensitive and fair-minded members' demand for a probe into the desecration and destruction of Charar-e-Sharief shrine and adjacent township in 1995, testifies to this perception. "We've given army a free hand in Kashmir. They are above and beyond any judicial enquiry" was his loud and proud reply. Then as well as now it is the rape of our collective composite psyche at the hands of the Indian state machinery which explains the extreme outrage of public on the streets of Kashmir.

Coming back to the confused response, an article carried by Greater Kashmir on 12-05-2006 subtitled. "Sex Rackets are a natural consequence of the promiscuity we are encouraging ourselves. Everyone has to play a role", compelled me to respond. The author needs to be patted

for a lot of information he displays in the article but has excelled in the art of mixing registers and creating a lot of perceptual confusion by mixing up general issues of societal and personal morality with the sex scandal which is purely and simply a question of the brute misuse of the position of power and state patronage of a crime whose magnitude, depth and range of penetration in the society sends shivers down the spine and explains the unprecedented demonstration of public outrage and anger. The author is confusing it with sex racket which is altogether a different issue and is a very rare occurrence in the traditional society of Kashmir. By putting different issues in one cauldron, the author is totally diluting the sexploitation issue by shifting the responsibility to the victims. (I don't know for what perhaps for being girls). This is tantamount to the absolute acquittal of criminals in the positions of power who have pushed innocent girls to prostitution through coercion and black-mail.

Of course they did not do it themselves. They have ironically used a woman to run the prostitution ring. The author, in short, has left no stone unturned to put the blame on girls for the sins they have never committed.

In his monologue even the term feminism comes under attack confusing it with moral licentiousness. Dear Sir, feminism does not mean a license to do anything and everything, however morally repugnant. It is a movement, a theory, a vision, an outlook which seeks to challenge all those biased views and opinions which men have arbitrarily formed about women and the roles assigned to them, that are culturally constructed but neither biologically warranted nor sanctioned by any great religion although misinterpretations of religions vis-à-vis women abound because of the patriarchal theological imperial-

ism still pervasive visible in our world. In fact, Islamic feminism is more radical in tracing the growth of feminism back to the teachings and message of the Prophet of Islam (SAW) who fought against the persecution of girl child and the oppression of women at the hands of the family and the society. Therefore, the present debate is neither about promiscuous and permissive social life style of girls nor about your understanding of feminism which is unbridled ambition to go to any extent to satisfy one's desires. It is about apportioning responsibility where it is due and bringing criminals against humanity to justice by weeding out the rot from the system.

Even in Euro-American permissive and promiscuous societies, sexual abuse of women by men on the positions of power is intolerable. There are innumerable instances where the high profile ministers, army, police and civil officers had to relinquish their positions of power when their sexual adventures came to light. To top them all, the former US president Bill Clinton's sexual scams shook the capitol Hill to the bottom and left him almost emasculated by engaging the attention of the world media for at least three years. The daily debates and fresh revelations of his sex scandals continued till he was brought on toes and interrogated umpteen times (even though the consent of girls was present in his case if media reports are to be believed) but the public embarrassment devastated him and brought him tottering down to the nadir of shame.

In the present case if the state and the central government is serious to establish the confidence of Kashmiris in their discredited system, they must seriously and honestly probe the scandal within a limited time frame to remove the pollutants and undesirable elements from the

system.

This is also an acid test for Indian civil society and the women NGOs to bring pressure on the central and state government to take the issue more seriously in order to bring the criminals to justice and to cleanse the rot from within. That could facilitate the arrival of a new virgin tomorrow in the baffled, battered and bruised valley of Kashmir.

Round Table Eyewash (May 24, 2006)

I wonder where to begin and where to end while talking about duplicitous politics of the Indian State in Kashmir because as much ink has been used to write on it as the tears Kashmiris have shed over the past 16 years for the tragedy which has engulfed them. But let me confine myself to Round Table Conference at the moment. Is the Round Table Conference a genuine attempt to solve the Kashmir problem or is it used as a ploy to dilute and marginalize the dominant grand narrative in Kashmir? Well the composition of the Conference will explain whether India is serious to tackle the issue by involving all the resistance groups political or militant who have been in the foreground of the struggle for the right to self-determination or to assemble a blizzard of viewpoints to strength her own stand on Kashmir. If the first such conference is any guide then the conference is nothing but a show of mostly individual and small group voices which support Indian occupation in Kashmir.

What has happened over the past many years in seminars and conferences sponsored directly or indirectly by New Delhi is the collection of individual and small group voices besides few "dissident" Kashmiri voices to drown the grand bloody narrative of Kashmir in the deluge of

babble of voices whereby any change in the status quo is presented as impossibility. Or the overemphasis in such a conference on the socio-religio and political diversity is aimed at strengthening the little narratives only to destabilize the dominant narrative of Kashmir. The present much talked about conference is an extension of the same exercise. This is nothing but the application of the postmodern discourse on an issue which demands a democratic solution. India talks democracy, walks democracy, breathes democracy, and swears by democracy and the present prime minister is supposed to be an epitome of democratic culture, yet when it comes to Kashmir politics he too follows the foot steps of his predecessors in being chained by the ossified stand and the manipulative methods of bureaucracy and different government agencies.

In any democratic set up problems are solved on the basis of democratic principles and the soul of democracy is that the majoritarian view prevails in every matter. A government is formed even when 51% seats are won by a particular party and the remaining 49 have to accept this decision of 51% electorate. The losers accept their defeat and do not argue that they remain unrepresented in the government because that would be a negation of the underlying principles by which a democracy operates.

To cut the cackle and come to horses, the uncomplicated way forward in case of Kashmir issue is the determination of the majority view to solve the problem and the exact democratic equivalent for finding it is to refer it to people in the entire state under an impartial agency. But the governments in Delhi have been evading this democratic solution and continue to use all dilatory and diffusive methods to divert the attention from the core issue and its democratic method of solution and at best

replace it with postmodernistic problematic pluralism puncturing the major narrative by laying overemphasis on little narratives of small groups of political social and religious nature. By so doing little narratives are allowed to gain ground and the main narrative is fractured, splintered and thus marginalized. This is preposterous and against all underlying democratic principles by which India swears day and night and taunts Pakistan, Nepal or Burma for its absence. The present Round Table Conference is an effort in the direction of marginalizing the dominant Kashmir voice by the blizzard of other individual voices and to weaken it so much as to never let it raise its head again. It's not aimed at solving the problem but at lifting the lid from a Pandora's Box where conflicting single voices will be let loose to drown the majority voice. It's besides the point, whether resistance forces represent this voice but they certainly do reflect it. It is perhaps for this reason that they have refused to participate in the Round Table Conference which ostensibly they understand but do not sufficiently articulate.

India herself is a living example of how plurality of perspective and socio religious diversity is addressed by keeping safeguards for all minority groups within the large state without marginalizing the majority in the overall pattern of the state.

It is high time India takes cognizance of the majority sentiment in Kashmir and addresses the core issue accordingly without wriggling out from it either by further involving us in the semantic rhetoric of 'it is not the core issue but stands at the core of our nationhood' or 'geographical boundaries are sacrosanct', or history has changed and the old formulas cannot be applied or the sanctity of the spirit of UN resolutions has been defiled

by time.

India has to demonstrate to the world her high moral ground by exercising bold political will to grapple with the problem and engage the voices of the millions of the voiceless people to arrive at an acceptable solution of Kashmir issue, primarily to Kashmiris.

Our roads, streets, lanes and bylanes are soaked in blood, thousands of homes have been devastated, thousands of youth have been maimed and paralyzed, thousands of children orphaned, property worth billions has been destroyed, thousands of people have been displaced; countless women have been raped and hundreds of thousands of people have been disfigured and impaired mentally as well as physically. In short the entire population has been traumatized over the past 16 years. I wish I could exactly articulate the pain, the agony, the trauma and torment, the insecurity and erosion of privacy which we have borne over the years and continue to bear:

'Intelligence gives me the exact names of things (of feelings and emotions), let my word be the thing itself. (The feeling itself) newly created by my soul.

But since it is an impossible dream to tell the whole truth of the story, suffice it to say that the blood spilled and the tears shed should suffice to move the hearts and minds of the decision makers in Delhi to address this long festering wound seriously and honestly. They must realize that they cannot build the edifice of national pride and prestige on the tears of those who have been held against their will. Such a realization, alone, can pave the way for much longed for and much-awaited genuine peace, harmony, security and prosperity in Kashmir and by extension stability in India and Pakistan.

Fallacious Backlash of Sex Scandal (June 1, 2006)

The explosion of sex scandal, which shook us beyond measure, has thrown up many issues which need to be debated and discussed to clear the confusion and put the things in the right perspective.

The backlash instead of being directed against the criminals has been aimed at women in general, putting ban on their movement outside home.

This is done by religious zealots who are doing a lot of disservice to their religion and Muslims by suffocating girls in their homes. It is, besides being tyrannical, a retrograde step, aimed at dragging women back to the Dark Ages like cattle driven to a slaughter-house by the self-styled custodians of religion who or for that matter, anyone else, have no moral authority to do so. If they are really concerned about a healthy and clean society, they should understand that the genuine test of virtue or moral well-being does not lie in remaining confined to claustrophobic enclosed space of home and hearth but in the broad day light of history. And that applies to both men and women. It is only the vision of evil which makes good to flourish. It may sound paradoxical but is borne out by human experience. The positive human potential flowers

in an inseparable mixture of good and evil.

Iqbal while commenting on the passivity, stagnation and the closed-mindset of Muslims in particular has said that a number of great religions in the world were wiped out from the face of history because those religions did not keep pace with the new demands of the evolving human race. They did not satisfy the growing spiritual needs of the progressing human kind and hence died a natural death. The practitioners of religion should understand that religions have a way of violating their microstructures, without denting their macrostructures, to keep pace with time. Islam in particular has the potential of relaxing the boundaries of context-bound laws and rules only to reinvigorate and reenergize it. It has the capacity to make subtle adjustments with the new emerging realities without puncturing its fundamental principles; or it does so only to strengthen them further. Iqbal encapsulates the inherent possibilities of the Holy Quran thus:

Sad jahan aabad dar aayati oost/ asr ha pooshedah
dar aafaati-e-oost

Zindagee ra me kunad tafseer-e-nou/ Mei dihad een
khwab ra tabeer-e-nou (Of it each verse is a universe,
each moment an aeon. It lends a new meaning to life, a
new interpretation to our dreams.) In every period.

What we suffer from, is utter lack of understanding of this potential of Holy Qur'an and instead we tend to replace the fundamentals of Islam with secondary issues and its spirit with dry lifeless legalism.

Instead of using the decent and persuasive methods of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we take refuge in violent and insulting methods which naturally prove counterproductive. Instead of enlightening others about the primacy

of faith in God and religion for the sacred basis of humanity and that too for our good, we violate that sanctity by using unpleasant tactics to bring people round to conform to a moral norm. Instead of making others understand that without satisfying our spirit, we reduce ourselves either to animals or at best to self-regulating and self-defeating automatons. Instead of teaching people that only by relating ourselves to God could we have a unified, integrated self that can dramatize its response to the Plenitude of Being or else be condemned to self's slow dialogue with itself. Contrary to all this, we fill them with the fear of God as if he were a policeman living only at the animal level, by which I mean unbridled gratification of senses and instincts, we only plunge ourselves into the depths of darkness and a living death. Alienation from God and his eternal moral laws which we intuitively experience and bear testimony to, only impoverish us and lead to total disintegration and degeneration of our lives. It's high time to realize that forcible imposition of the outer trappings of a particular religion does not ensure the purity of thought, body and soul. It is only the mysterious invisible silken tie which binds us to God and inevitably leads to the purification of our entire self. Violent and Unpleasant methods and forcible imposition of ethical code or dress code, for that matter, by groups only generates aversion in people towards religion and gives them a pretext to move farther away from it.

Yes, there is a dire need of a moral code of conduct to regulate and discipline our lives and not only the lives of women. This is to be taught and emphasized by the family, society and its multiple-institutions including schools, colleges, universities and to be observed strictly in the corridors of power and security, work places and

offices and other public places including hotels, restaurants, parlors, coaching centers, internet cafes and so on and so forth. This moral code of conduct transcends religious boundaries because at a very fundamental level, our ethical values in social life are the same throughout at least in the whole of South Asian subcontinent be it Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and so on. Therefore it is need-less to invoke Islam to be hurriedly dubbed as a fanatic and to be straightaway dismissed with disdain by the modernity-bitten progressives. But they should know that even the modern philosophers are concerned about the health and harmonious well being of the society. Otherwise Bertrand Russell wouldn't have warned moderns thus: 'As long as man lives in the society, absolute and unbridled gratification of the self cannot be the supreme principle of social ethics'.

This warning gains ground in view of what happened in the western world in the 20th Century and is now fast engulfing the whole of subcontinent as it doesn't want to lag behind in the race of loosening itself of the earth or 'kicking the very earth to pieces'.

That is why at least for the past two decades political and religious leaders in the West are giving a call of 'back to basics'. Millions of young couples take an oath to remain faithful in marriage and abstain from pre and post extra-marital sex to keep a clean, healthy and happy family and social life. The nature too had its nemesis in the form of AIDS and other deadly diseases. Last year in the UN conference on women I met members of a large number of NGOs who are fighting for old family values mostly from the United States and Europe and by interacting with them I found that they are now horrified after having experienced the devastating, disintegrating and polluting

consequences of libertinism, hedonism; permissiveness and promiscuity and their agenda was to ask UN to intervene in this matter by making some ethical code of conduct binding on the peoples of the member countries.

But in our context, everything boils down to the oppressive ban on women in one way or the other as if they are responsible for the sins committed against them or unilaterally responsible for the sins committed with their consent. I want to ask which authority whether religious or legal absolves man for the sins he commits and makes it obligatory only for women to observe decency and sanctity in life? I would like to know from, both the male chauvinists and female upholders of the male dominated culture in which man is considered superior to woman and ipso facto enjoys moral concessions (licentiousness) which can't be enjoyed by women. The impression is given that in any case of moral licentiousness which involves two partners, woman is the predator and poor helpless man is the victim of her lust, as if the lascivious prigs in the garb of some men are to be exonerated because women are the real temptresses; otherwise the so-called lustless, sex-less puritan men would never sin if women weren't around. Thus, it is women who should be stopped from coming out from tempting the 'puritan men'. This is totally unacceptable and outrageous. Nothing could be farther from truth. If examined properly, it is most of the times the other way round.

This obscurantist mindset has to change as it is against the moral and natural law. For decades now we have been talking of equality of the sexes before law which does not mean equality only in terms of educational and career opportunities open to both of them but recognizing them as equal human beings with a distinct centre of self

whence the lights and shades must fall with a certain difference. They have as much right to live as free humans, to move, to choose, to speak, to advance in education and of their own enlightenment and to have an opinion as men do. Any ethical or moral code has to be for both whether in offices or at home or in the society at large and both should be subject to the same punishment in case of the breach of this code.

It is only by liberating women from the age-old shackles of inhumanity, oppression, tyranny, discrimination, exploitation or sexploitation, and the curse of dowry that we can build a clean healthy, peace-loving, harmonious, progressive and forward looking society.

No society can genuinely flourish where one half of the population is treated as dumb driven cattle. Every conscious Kashmiri or for that matter, every colonized man knows what it means to be treated as an animal on whom everything is imposed from without in the political scenario of Kashmir and this does not exclude politicians from across the political divide.

I was simply pointing out a degenerate mindset (June 10, 2006)

Yes, it is not biology but the cultural meaning attached to the biological identity of women which is at the root of systematic injustice they suffer in the society, Dr. Hameeda Nayeem responds to 'Fallacy Repeated' by Ajaz-ul-Haque (Write Hand, Sunday June 4) published in Greater Kashmir

I had invited a debate in my article – Fallacious Backlash of Sex Scandal June 1, 2006 in Greater Kashmir on the double moral standards operative in the society vis-à-vis men and women and not the kind which has surprisingly exercised and agitated the mind of dear brother Ajaz-ul-Haque in 'Fallacy Repeated' June 4 2006. I am intrigued by what has worked him up so much that he has exhausted all his verbal, rhetorical, literary and argumentative energies to disprove the stark reality which stares us in the face every now and then – the structural inequality between men and women by which women suffer systematic injustice and that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but the cultural meaning attached to women's biological identity. And it's this which is at the root of discrimination, exploitation and oppression of women in any situation. Far from being diffusive or destabilizing, my argument strikes at the root cause of the sex scandal. Reiterating the obvious is only to

turn your attention to what lies behind it and therefore to address it seriously. It is not an invitation to an open war between men and women as Ajaz would have us believe but points a finger at the root cause of the exploitation of women and by so doing calls for an end to such fossilized mindset which denies women their dignified human status in the society; the absence of which renders them vulnerable to exploitation, blackmail and what have you. It is amply demonstrated in the treatment meted out to many women who are manipulated, caged and imprisoned in homes.

And before making this case, I had firmly grounded myself in the Islamic tradition so that no confusion arises as to my credentials which the writer of the piece duly and mercifully endorses. Being weary of 'isms' and ideologies, I did not 'brandish the sword of feminism', knowing that there are as many feminisms as feminists in the world today which the writer perhaps doesn't know. So without plunging into the realm of feminist academic discourse I was simply pointing out a degenerate mindset burdened with the weight of dead customs and conventionality, the cultural construction of the biological identity of women which is not only at the root of feverish knee jerk reaction of some religious groups and some social circles but at the root of the sex scandal itself. When such a horrendous tragedy strikes us, it is but natural that we go on digging and exploring all the possible causes responsible for such exploitation and therefore, discussing them is very timely and necessary.

If I understand the author's contention correctly, the whole burden of his write-up is to prove that I am needlessly creating an issue which doesn't, in reality, exist, that 'anomaly' - in gender relations does not exist or even if it

does, it is negligible and then goes on to take recourse in the public expression of outrage mostly by men at the sex scandal, to prove that all is well with Kashmir women. The verbal tirade is unleashed thus:

'So to thrust an outlandish dimension of gender on an issue bonding men and women against all human beasts sounds an impulsive act of brandishing the sword of feminism in a peaceful atmosphere of gender harmony ... If the issue is not moral, it is not biological too' ... and then goes on to conclude that I am pitting women against men which is equally fallacious.'

Any unbiased person knows that apart from the public outrage demonstrated on the streets, there were and still are heard audible cries, 'put the women back in homes, ban their visits to parlors, internet cafes, coaching centers, restaurants and so on. 'Take away their mobile sets, ban their watching TV screens' and hence a ban was placed on cable network which in their view is responsible for loosening the morals of girls, mind you, not boys!'

But fortunately some saner elements of our society swung into action in time and prevailed upon the groups to lift the ban on the cable network to let us watch different channels highlighting the issue and asked the groups not to confuse this sordid story with the general weakening of the moral fibre in the society. I have a strong feeling that the bans are on hold and will bounce back with greater intensity once the criminals of sex scandal are brought to justice. If the past is any guide then the calls for the forcible imposition of 'codes' and other things will be repeated as has been done in the past after some gaps. My whole argument was that the impulsive reaction is demonstrative of a fossilized decadent mindset which treats women as animals and I don't have to labour for

the obvious that it is not in the generic sense but in the metaphoric one that things are imposed on them by men who think they are the sole arbiters of their lives. Yet the author has tried to trivialize the issue by bringing in Emilia's light-hearted description of the difference between the sexes in culinary terms to prove that they are not treated as animals at large. One can't vulgarize the whole issue of women's oppression by sarcastically putting it that 'gender equality is a familiar chord stirred every time the innocence of women is jeopardized' If we don't raise the basic issue of gender discrimination and exploitation now, then when?

You can neither obscure the structural inequality which leads to systematic injustice of women, under the garb of verbosity nor can you frighten away women into silence and submission by your verbal or intellectual terrorism if you like. By vehemently asserting the gender harmony you are only flying in the face of evidence. To ascertain the truth of what I am saying, only listen to the heartbeats of women especially the married ones which have a different story to tell than the one you are so passionately espousing. Don't go merely by their public postures and desirable social attitudes in public which are again imposed on them by the cruel social demands of 'respectability' in a morally decadent and bankrupt society. I only wish that your naïve complacency were not misplaced so that I can sing with you 'God is in the heaven and all is well with (women)'. You can't make woolly generalizations on the basis of your personal experience or the experiences of a few. Of course there are Oases of harmony in the sprawling desert of oppression of women at the hands of men and the women upholders of patriarchal ideology.

My problem is that I do not condemn injustice selectively. I stand for justice of any kind, be it the case of colonized people of Kashmir or the colonized and exploited women anywhere in the world or colonized, deprived and suffering people anywhere in the world and I do not let any ideology intervene to trap me in its narrow vestments. I feel the victims' pain and agony in every fiber of my body and soul and at the time of acute crises try to write about these which are nothing but reflections of the basic injustice. I am not a columnist who may be compelled to create a non-existent issue when short of matter to meet the deadlines or to indulge in the luxury of verbal games as I would prefer to do more fruitful things. At the same time I am fully conscious of the problematics of communication but that does not stop me from telling the untold stories of voiceless women.

PS: Yes I forgot to comment on this portion of the write-up, 'we must not polemicise the whole argument to the point of destabilizing the basics...' Which argument of mine is aimed at destabilizing the basics? The writer's argument itself is flawed as I am not pointing out the problem to shake the basics but by calling for an end to injustice and the mindset which gives rise to it, I am only trying to strengthen the basics. My objection to western brand of feminism is precisely for the reason that it is not grounded in the metaphysical and spiritual grounding and the Islamic feminism objects to it on the same ground. From Islamic point of view men don't have 'authority' over women as you opine but have been charged with the responsibility of protecting them and providing for them. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brings men and women on an equal footing so far as their rights are concerned in his farewell address: 'You have rights over your women and

your women have rights over you'. Where is the room then for authoritarian authority of one over the other? Even the verse you have quoted, containing the word 'Nigahbaan' is not the military idiom of 'control' nor the economic one of the possession of power but it is the humanness of man invoked to protect the delicate sex and not to rule over her.

The Decision to Hang Afzal (Oct, 4, 2006)

There is nothing new in hanging Afzal Guru in Tihar Jail on October 20th which could jolt us out of torpor, but for the timing of the hanging and times in which the black outrageous deed is to be carried out. The Indian State or more precisely, Delhi establishment has always played with the sentiments of Kashmiris and shown scantest regard for their sensitivities. So far as the veracity of the case is concerned, S A S Geelani who was also falsely framed in the parliament attack and has mercifully been acquitted with the intervention of the prominent citizens of Delhi – has voiced the feelings of the majority of Kashmiris when he said that 'New Delhi is going ahead with the hanging of another innocent Kashmiri'.

Though for some it is immaterial whether he is 'innocent' or not because capital punishment is barbarous in either case (incidentally one wonders where are those human rights activists in India today who would plead vociferously against the capital punishment given to a rapist and a killer of a young school girl in Calcutta).

What is new about the hanging is the timing which falls on Juma at-al-Vida of Ramazan, thereby blatantly and outrageously hurting the religious sentiments of Kashmiris over and above the case being a framed case. Or shall we say it is the grandiose demonstration of In-

dian secularism in Kashmir? That too when the atmosphere was full of optimism that Ramazan might prove to be the beginning of the end of violence in the state from both sides as Hizbul Mujahideen had indicated of reciprocating the ceasefire offer from the Government of India.

What is different in this case from Feb 11, 1984 when Maqbool Bhat was hanged is that, at that time there was no armed resistance going on, only the strangled silent resistance in the minds of people which eventually erupted with full force into full-blown struggle for freedom as his hanging provided fuel to the smouldering fire within.

Had India been sincere and genuinely sought to integrate Kashmiris emotionally with the Indian Union, she would have learnt from her past blunders in Kashmir and would not have unnecessarily provoked us at critical junctures. Afzal Guru's hanging will not serve any warning to Kashmiris as heads on stakes were supposed to do to the natives of Congo for raising their voice against the colonizers in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This 'head on the stake' will only complete the estrangement of Kashmiris from New Delhi and revive and fortify the armed and political resistance which was otherwise on the wane according to government reports.

Perhaps that is exactly what the hawks in the Indian establishment want to gain from this move, to keep their indispensability intact in the so-called security apparatus by putting Kashmir on the boil.

Otherwise what is the India State going to gain from sending one more innocent Kashmiri to the gallows who has come to symbolize to Kashmiris their struggle, testified to by the massive protests against the hanging

throughout Kashmir? This is to be analyzed in the backdrop of the warm handshake between President Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh which had revived hopes of the resumption of the stalled dialogue over Kashmir after 7/11 between India and Pakistan. What is this present ruse all about that Delhi Darbar is playing with Kashmiris' sentiments or with the regional peace, which is also coupled with the fresh clamouring of Pak hand in 7/11 Mumbai blasts. Interestingly Malegaon blast is not mentioned in which people of only one particular community were killed. All this boils down to a demonstration of communal politics designed to outrage Kashmiris (which includes other communities in the state) and to use Afzal Guru Case as a subterfuge to derail the peace process which had come to a stage at which Kashmir issue was to be taken up by horns. Delhi is not only playing ruses but descends to a level of crass inhumanity and brutality time and again. The Guru case is being used as a subterfuge to wriggle out of the peace process. The punishment and the timing is all too political, expedited by those who do not want Prime Minister Manmohan to go ahead in the dialogue process as he had indicated in his one-on-one meeting with President Musharraf at Havana. While he was still locked in the handshake, hawks in the establishment were simultaneously managing to schedule the hanging on the most sensitive and sacred day of Muslims so that the hurt penetrates to the bones of Kashmiris while they themselves have the last satanic laugh at the bleak chance of renewed peace process. The attention of the people is diverted wholesale from the so-called peace process which has not yielded any dividends so far in Kashmir but was coming round to a point where they were likely to get relief from decades old turmoil and tribulations.

But the hawks in the central establishment couldn't bear to see that day becoming a reality because that will mean the end of their dreams of making the best out of the blood of Kashmiris. Raking up of Mumbai blasts afresh and pointing a finger at Pak after the warm handshake is nothing but an attempt to take the situation back to square one. As if that was not enough, these hawks had to find more outrageous, more heart-rending, emotionally explosive case to arrest the course of dialogue and divert the course of events wholesale from hopes of ceasefire to desperation. Otherwise there are innumerable cases pending against so many people, ranging from demolishers and desecraters of Babri Mosque, the temple of God, to those who carried out the carnage and communal cleansing in Gujrat. They are not even booked, not to talk of being given the capital punishment which proves beyond any doubt that Kashmiris are chosen for 'special treatment' by the 'custodians of Indian democracy'.

Even the frown on Kashmiris faces smacks of crime against 'Indian national integrity and 'democracy'. The present case symbolizes to these hawks an attack on the temple of Indian democracy. Without going into the truth or falsity of such a case, if the alleged remote link of Afzal Guru in the attack deserves capital punishment, what should be the punishment for that establishment which has consistently and persistently snatched the democratic rights of a whole nation over the past sixty years? If the symbol is so important, though no damage has been done to this 'grand symbol', how many capital punishments should be given to the successive regimes in Delhi for denial and the naked aggression on the democratic rights of Kashmiris-right to self-determination being the primary democratic human right? Or how many capital punish-

ments should be given to the desecraters and demolishers of Babri Masjid in the broad daylight in the glare of media and in the presence of police or to those who ripped apart a foetus while piercing the womb of a mother to cleanse Gujarat of Muslim population (read as pollution) and wiped out from the fair face of earth the entire localities in Gujrat? Or to those who have set on fire the entire localities, villages, townships and shopping malls in Kashmir along with human beings?

These are questions to ponder over for those who are so much concerned about the symbolic structures of democracy and throw democracy and democratic rights of people to winds. Kashmiris should not ask for mercy for Guru as that tantamounts to acknowledging the so-called proven role of Guru in the attack, (as collaborators are doing for they are scared of being pushed further to the wall) they must demand justice for Guru and thereby justice for Kashmir as today he has come to symbolize the 'cribbed, crabbed and confined' Kashmiri, who is not guilty like Macbeth but whose heart bleeds like Hamlet's for the primordial wrongs done to his/ her motherland. The need of the hour is to join hands sincerely to protest against the unjust verdict and its execution rather than stage separate political shows for selfish ends.

Kashmiris are fed up with internal bickering and are tired of deploring the disunity and diffusion within the resistance forces. They are not amused to witness the ego tussles of those who claim to be the custodians of the blood of Kashmiris while sitting on the huge stock of sacrifices, poor, hapless Kashmiris have given for a just cause and not for perpetrating the political hegemony of one person or party over the other.

The Commitment of an Intellectual (Sep 25, 2007) presented in a G K Seminar.

Who is an intellectual, is the first question that comes to my mind because unless we are clear about the definition of an intellectual in our context, we will not be able to apportion responsibility and to state clearly what is it he/she has to be committed to and this I have to do in relation to the broad theme and that is the role of an intellectual in Kashmiri civil society at present. To underscore the commitment is very important, given the fact that the active elements in Kashmir civil society have been systematically delegitimized, de-recognized and dismantled especially in the past twenty years, beginning with crack-down on the voluntary services provided by voluntary organizations like Helali Ahmar from every village and town to the often curfew-bound Srinagar city in the early 90's and the killing of human rights defenders like Jaleel Andrabi, Dr Guru, Dr Farooq Ashai etc and of those who were ideologically oriented or supported the freedom struggle. There is a plethora of definitions available but I will choose the two most famous 20th century descriptions of intellectuals which are fundamentally opposed on that point and then to state which description is applicable in our context based on what is available in our civil society: one by Antonio Gramsci, a brilliant political phi-

philosopher, activist and journalist and the other by Julien Benda, the idealist. At the one extreme there is Gramsci's very pragmatic description of an intellectual and on the other the idealistic description by Julien Benda.

Benda defines intellectuals as a tiny band of super-gifted and morally endowed philosopher kings who constitute the conscience of mankind. His treatise – Betrayal of the Intellectuals has lived in posterity more as a blistering attack on intellectuals who abandon their calling and compromise the principles than as a systematic analysis of intellectual life. And the figures he cites are larger than life like Jesus, Socrates, Spinoza, Voltaire etc.

We do not have such figures around, therefore it will be an exercise in futility to set such high standards which cannot be fulfilled by anyone in our midst and since my concern is pragmatic, to suggest a plan of action to those who could do it, I will not rush where the angels fear to tread.

I will rather choose Antonio Gramsci's description of an intellectual as a starting point because that is closer to our reality and something which many in our midst can do and something which needs to be done earnestly and with passion and conviction. Also because his description of the role of an intellectual is linked with his theorizing on ideology, power and hegemony and their inter-section. When I cast an impartial glance on the world around me I see the same perpetuated repression and status quo as he points out, only the nomenclature of the warring parties differs. And if someone refuses to acknowledge this reality, I can only feel sad for him and sing with Ghalib.

*Ya rab na samjay hai na samjay gai mere baat
Dey unko dil jo na dai mujko zubaan aur*

According to Gramsci "All men (all human beings) are intellectuals but not all of them have in society the function of intellectuals. He divides intellectuals into two groups. First, traditional intellectuals such as academics, priests, and administrators who continue to do the same things from generation to generation. Second, organic intellectuals whom he saw as directly connected to classes and enterprises. He believed they are actively involved in society, that is, they constantly struggle to change minds and expand markets. They are always on the move, on the make unlike teachers and priests who seem more or less to remain in place, doing the same kind of work year in and out.

Gramsci theorizes on how the political society works and how it co-opts civil society – (defined as all those people not part of the government) – through ideological hegemony. He improves upon what Marx says about how the capitalist society or the ruling class runs its writ i.e. through coercion, police and armed force. Gramsci opined that the dominant political society can never succeed in controlling people. It is through its dominant penetrative ideological hegemony which works to support the status quo or in our case the colonial rule. He theorized that what was needed was a 'counter-hegemony'. In order to produce it, the struggling people will need their own organic intellectuals. These would come from within the struggling peoples working toward a 'counter hegemony' by actively engaging and leading in social relations. The role of an organic intellectual is a merging of theory and praxis which means that he should not only demystify various elements of dominant ideology by a political discourse but at the same time organize civil society which can become a potent resistance force to counter the po-

litical hegemony. It was here that Gramsci made a major contribution to modern thought in his concept of the role played by ideology.

Often the term 'ideology' is seen as referring simply to a system of ideas and beliefs. However, it is closely related to the concept of power and the definition given by Giddens is probably the easiest to understand. He defines ideology as "shared ideas or beliefs which serve to justify the interests of dominant groups". (Giddens 1997:583). Its relationship to power is that it legitimizes the dominant group's or power's ideology and as such distorts the real situation that people find themselves in.

Gramsci felt that what needs to be promoted by an organic intellectual is an understanding of the subtle but pervasive forms of ideological control and manipulation that serves to perpetrate all repressive structures. He identified two quite distinct forms of political control: domination which referred to direct physical coercion by police and armed force and hegemony which referred to both ideological control and more crucially consent. He assumed that no regime or power regardless of how authoritarian it might be could sustain itself through organized state power and armed force. In the long run it has to have popular support and legitimacy in order to maintain stability. By hegemony 'Gramsci meant the permeation throughout society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organizing principle' that is defused by the process of socialization into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the population and becomes part of 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture,

morality of the dominant political society comes to appear as the natural order of things (Boggs 1976: 39).

If the hegemony of the dominant political society or colonial power resulted from an ideological bond between the rulers and the ruled, then the right strategy is to create 'counter-hegemony' to that of the ruling class. They have to see structural change and ideological change as part of the same struggle.

While traditional intellectuals imagine themselves as an autonomous group separate from political struggles, they are, in fact, strongly allied with dominant ideology whereas organic intellectuals recognize their location within the dominant ideology and use their positionality to cultivate strategies for their communities to develop a self inspired organic consciousness.

Now what Gramsci says about the strategies of ruling classes is exactly what Indian state has been doing for the past 60 years through distorting our history, throttling democratic aspirations and aggressive diplomatic and media campaigns and lately army, besides its repressive role, has joined this choir by undertaking to change the mind sets and attitudes of the subject race. This is substantiated by the recently released (Dec. 31, 2006) doctrine for sub conventional warfare by the Indian Army which deals with low threshold wars. It says that ... 'the military operations should aim firstly, at neutralizing all hostile elements in the conflict zone that oppose peace initiatives and secondly at transforming the will and attitudes of the people.

The endeavour should be to bring about a realization that fighting the government is a 'no win' situation and that anti-government stance will only delay the return of

the peace and normalcy... The manifestation of such realization can take from a couple of years to decades, as attitudes take time to form and change. (P.21-22)

Efforts have also been made 'by the government sponsored NGO's' to co-opt civil society in the recent years to make it feel ashamed of its own freedom struggle and settle for status quo and the management of the conflict.

Now the commitment of an organic intellectual in our civil society is to break the stranglehold of knowledge-power nexus, of dominant discourse by re-writing history, narratives, demystifying various government agendas, policies, programs and manipulations and carry out aggressive campaign against the disinformation and misinformation in different parts of Indian nation. Our oppressor is the state and not the people, yet paradoxically it is the people who choose at least the political governing body and by targeting people in our counter-hegemony campaign we could get hitherto unimaginable results. Secondly such intellectuals should come together and organize civil society along these lines so that it becomes a potent force to reckon with. It is heartening that few of our intellectuals have been doing this for the past many years but what is altogether missing is that they do not organize civil society along the lines of an alternative discourse. But most of our pseudo 'intellectuals' imagine themselves as transcendently located with historical presence above and beyond the political struggles. Unfortunately they have been afflicted by dry Bohemian aestheticism and so called philosophy of detachment and continue to be afflicted by it even today when we are in the grip of dominant ideological hegemony and indescribable tragedies which cry for the intellectual's intervention. They indulge in verbal jugglery and intellectual gym-

nastics without any direction or commitment but only to show off their learning. It is high time they disentangle themselves from dominant ideology and serve the cause of the 'wretched of the earth'.

Taking while fully endorsing the views of Gramsci, I would also insist with Edward Said that the intellectual is an individual with a specific role in society that cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional. The central fact is that the intellectual is an individual "endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to as well as for a public. His place is to publicly raise embarrassing questions, to confront ideology, orthodoxy and dogma".

The intellectual does so on the basis of universal principles that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers and nations and that deliberate or inadvertent violation of these standards needs to be testified and fought against courageously. An intellectual does not merely say or write these things because after much reflection, they are what he believes in and also wants to persuade others to his view. And while he is doing so, there is always the personal inflection and the private sensibility and those give meaning to what is being said or written (said).

Least of all is he/she a tranquilizer to his/her audiences because the whole point is to be embarrassing, even unpleasant, while raising issues seriously and honestly.

To said purpose of the intellectual's activity is to advance human freedom and knowledge. This is still true despite the oft repeated charge that 'grand narratives of

emancipation and enlightenment are no longer having any currency (Lyotard). For governments still manifestly oppress people, grave miscarriages of justice still occur, the co-optation and inclusion of intellectuals by power can still effectively quieten their voices and deviation of intellectuals from their vocation is still very often the case.

In the words of C Wright Mills, an American sociologist "the independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping. Fresh perception now involves the capacity to continually unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications swamp us. These worlds of mass-art and mass-thought are increasingly geared to the demands of politics. That is why it is in politics that intellectual solidarity and effort must be centered. If the thinker does not relate himself to the value of truth in political struggle he can't responsibly cope with the whole of live experience.

This is far from an easy task. The intellectual always stands between loneliness and alignment. He is neither a pacifier nor a consensus builder but someone who is unwilling to accept easy formulas or clichés – confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say and is willing to say so in public. Intellectual vocation is a state of constant alertness of a perpetual willingness not to let half truths or received ideas steer one along. This involves an almost athletic rational energy.

RECONCILIATION

Reconciling Difference Across Divides - I (Dec 25, 2007)

This paper is based on the presentation made in an intra-Kashmir Women's Conference, the first of its kind, in at Broadway Hotel Srinagar Nov 16-18-2007.

There are not only geographical boundaries that divide us but there are dividing lines on the landscape of the mind, of emotions, and the landscape of the spirit. But the deepest divide is the political divide between India and Kashmir. The prerequisite of any reconciliation is justice and unless the genuine demands based on the universal principles of justice and democracy are acceded to and the fundamental and universal rights of the Kashmiri people are restored, no reconciliation worth the name is possible. To be more specific, reconciliation between India and Kashmir is possible only when Kashmiris are allowed to exercise their right to Self-Determination to determine the political future of their state and their verdict is respected and implemented in letter and spirit or a negotiated settlement arrived at between India and Pakistan endorsed and ratified by the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

For this purpose, Indian nation has to take every step to remove the divide by transcending hyper-nationalism

which, in effect, gives the State absolute totalitarian control over the people who are made subservient to the overriding state authority. People are unwittingly made to serve the interests of the rulers and subjected to the oppression and repression of people, their rights and their voice. It is this hyper-nationalism which is whipped up by the government agencies and the political parties time and again to actually serve their own interests of perpetuating their power over the nation. It is this stranglehold of the nexus of different state forces that Indian people have to break to be able to connect to Kashmiris. They can realize this objective by re-conceptualizing their nationhood, their nationalism in a way that gives precedence to people's rights over the state because what does a nation mean if people are denied their rights. Nation is made up of people who willingly come together to form a country for their mutual benefits. And if they interrogate the nationalism that doesn't ensure them the exercise of their rights and control over their resources the creative participation in the democratic processes, they are only raising a genuine issue which must be respected and heard at all costs.

Kashmiris so far have not been given the right to determine their political future, granted by UN and upheld and promised by Pt. Nehru, the first Prime Minister of free India. Nehru has categorically declared that there shall be no forced unions, no forced marriages, "Kashmiris will be allowed to go their way and we shall go ours even if that pains us". This is well documented and referred to by many writers on Kashmir including Direndra Sharma's book; India's Commitments on Kashmir it's use.

Nehru was in fact upholding the same principle of nationalism where people willingly become a part of a bigger union and if the union demes them their right if

they refuse to do so, they must be allowed to go their way.

That alone could lead to a 'Grand Revolutionary Transformatory Reconciliation' between India and Kashmir and the reconciliation of differences within the state between regions and communities will ensure harmonious and peaceful relations of people within the state, which I will take up one by one but secondary issues. Those who are prioritizing these differences are actually using subterfuges to deflect the attention from the basic issue that is part of the dominant discourse as a way of silencing and diffusing the discourse of the dominated. No wonder, in a recent gathering in my response to such a discourse which is trying to change the basic premise and parameters of the Kashmir problem, I was told by the main speaker, my dear brother that I don't show any growth as I am still harping on the same old discourse (growth in this context means ignoring ground realities and concentrating on peripheries) because the new discourse would insist that all those are old-fashioned who continue to articulate the basic problem. It will insist that we are articulating clichés, knowing fully well that they are prevaricating on Kashmir and indulging in the politics of deception. The discourse will fashion pejorative and derogatory terms to dub us so that we are silenced forever. The very purpose of this newly churned and refurbished dominant discourse in the name of the 'reconciliation' is to bulldoz away the major discourse of the assertion of rights and resistance to repression and domination in Kashmir. Dear brother, I would also love to move ahead, if the dominant power changes the ground realities here. Till that happens I will continue to reiterate the voice of the dominated and the 'wretched of the earth.' And if in your logo, persistent articulation of the basic Kashmir is-

sue, manifest in highest military occupation, with its attendant indescribable tragedies and sufferings for Kashmiris, is lack of growth, I would prefer to be labeled a person who is in eternal stasis or a state of vegetation rather than a person who has shown growth (if growth as implicitly defined by you lies in pushing aside the brutal ground realities and focusing only on peripheral issues within the state) as a subterfuge to evade the larger question.

I whole-heartedly crave for the day when Kashmir issue will be resolved to the satisfaction of the majority of people in Jammu and Kashmir in conformity with the universal principles of justice and democracy. Then I would change my discourse and 'sing of the things to come' I could wholly and solely turn my attention to the plight of women and advocate their rights as given to them by God, as co-equals of men in terms of rights and human status not in terms of biology as such a difference is something to be celebrated and not something to be ashamed of or to be apologetic about. Then I could turn my attention wholly to the subjects close to my heart like religion, philosophy, literatures, critical theories, psychology, history and so on which could bring about real growth and emancipation from within. But where the body and spirit are in chains, one's outer world is converted into a tortuous prison, where every moment reminds one of brutal and grim realities around, (provided one is receptive to the vibrations of pain and suffering arising out of the present situation), how could one discourse in ivory towers about open spaces. How could one talk of pale moon and world conquerors as T S Eliot pejoratively talked of those who ignored the realities in the early 20th century and went on writing of old romantic themes which seemed

out of touch with reality. Eliot had to redefine both the nature and function of literature in conformity with the then-existing realities in his world. So I would continue to reflect, comment and seek engagement with on, the current realities till positive changes are brought about in the situation world.

II

However I would also like to focus on how the relations between regions and communities could be strengthened and peace and harmony promoted. Because there are regional and communal divides within the state which need to be bridged. So far-as the ethnic, religious and linguistic divides are concerned, those should be acknowledged, respected and celebrated because different cultures, languages and modes of living only add variety and colour to our life and make it a mini world in itself. Homogeneity and uniculture take away much charm, colour and variety from life. So differences of this nature should truly be celebrated and respected.

So far as the regional divides based on political grievances are concerned, those could be sorted out by a reality check. Whereas people from Jammu and Ladakh have always expressed grievances against the dominance of Kashmiri Muslims, the actual situation is different. According to a recent survey Muslims form over 65% of the State's total population, Hindus less than 30% Sikhs less than 3% and Buddhists and Christians 2%.

Out of their total population Muslims form only 2.8% of the entire administration of the State, Hindus 4.61% of their population, Sikhs 6.37% of their population and Buddhists and Christians together 4.85% of their population. Out of the 63 IAS officers only 30 are Muslims, 28

Hindus, 3 Sikhs and two Buddhists. Muslim representation in top bureaucracy in the lineup is zero.

Kashmir's all financial commission as and principal secretaries have been non-Muslims except one. No Muslim bureaucrat heads any important department. From 1914 to 1979, no State police-head was a Muslim. Today it is worse. Presently the state's 7 DGPs and 5 ADGP rank officers are all non-Muslims and only 3 out of 15 IGPs are Muslims.

Out of 15 DIGs only 6 are Muslims; Out of 87 SSPs only 26 are Muslims; Out of 111 IPS officers only 33 are Muslims.

This is the factual situation of the administrative and police set up. Where is then the question of Muslim domination? These discrepancies must be removed and proportional representation promoted to ensure harmonious relationship between the communities and regions.

Divides on the landscape of spirit could be removed through interfaith dialogues. Religious tolerance as seen in the committed religious figure rather than in the writings of secularists and helpful alone can be authentic, as insider's liberal perspective is something which can fanaticisms of various religious and exclusivist exoteric theological dogmatisms.

Such authentic representative voices as that of Vivekananda from Hinduism, Friths of Schuon from Islam converge on the point of accepting diversity of religions and rejection of exoteric dogmatist theological claims of supremacy which are behind religions obscurantism.

Whereas Shuon says that different religions are various formal manifestations of the same Godhead-they de-

rive their strength from one spiritual fountainhead, in his books Islam and the Perennial Philosophy & (ii) Transcendent Unity of Religions, Vivekananda has praised in other religions what he has found wanting in Hinduism. His admiration of Islam is evident from his inimitable statement that Vedantic brain is nothing unless wedded to Islam body and that 'I see the future of India in the beautiful marriage of the two'. What I am trying to emphasize is that two major religions not only in India but also in Kashmir are Hinduism and Islam and one way of removing the divides between the two is to make the above mentioned representative voices as lodestars for people of both communities through interfaith dialogues at various levels to offset the political exploitation of religion by politicians who are generating hostilities, hatred and biases among various religious groups for their own ends so that one does not have to be an apologist for toleration of other communities but recognize the others' right to exist with honour and dignity and appreciate diversity as something contributing to the richness of one's culture.

Division of Jammu and Kashmir State and its continuing tragic aftermath has fractured our reality into splinters. Be it five displacements of Kashmiri Muslims across the border or the painful exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley to Jammu, all are bits and pieces of our fractured reality. Honest acknowledgement of each other's pain and suffering and sympathy with the people who suffered more than most in the valley is one way of reconciling differences across communal divides. And the first step towards this end should be an unqualified demand from other communities for demilitarization of Kashmir Valley especially its civilian space of 310184 kanals of land which has been occupied by various occu-

pation forces like Army, BSF, CRPF and dismantling of SOGs and Task Force which, besides, Indian forces have created havoc in the length and breadth of the valley and the Muslim dominated areas of Jammu.

I am especially referring to demilitarization because in the past many years at various fora some non-Muslims especially from Jammu have been opposing Demilitarization and the revocation of draconian laws like AFSPA, DAA, PSA Arm Forces Special Powers Act, Disturbed Area Act Public Safety Act etc so much so that it seems as if they get a vicarious satisfaction from the inflicted pain and suffering on the other community by forces' brutalities. They need to remove this perception on priority basis by demanding the demilitarization of 310148 kanals of civilian space straight away. This move can thaw solid boundaries and both the communities can take a dip in the deep waters of reconciliation brought about instantly. Since I saw the boundaries melting down in the sharing session of the women's conference when participants heard each other's tragic tales across the geographical artificial border and shed real tears of humanity.

This brings me to the last divide between the two parts of Kashmir, divided by the line of control or ceasefire line. Though apparently there is no emotional, spiritual and political divide between the two parts, yet in my interaction over the past few years with some political parties of Azad Kashmir, I have received an impression (it could be wrong also) that they fear of being marginalized in case of re-integration of the State. The best way to remove those fears is to envision a federal structure of the state in any future dispensation, not the kind of what India has, which for all practical purposes is unitary system but federal in the real sense where different regions would have maxi-

mum autonomy and the union government could be formed through proportional representation from all the autonomous units.

Where are Kashmiri Women today? (March 8, 2008)

On the occasion of Women's International Day, one can't but begin by assessing how much progress women's empowerment has made in terms of education, in terms of economic empowerment, in terms of socio-political empowerment and on top of all, in terms of human empowerment. Because empowerment is a multifaceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. It is not mere economic empowerment as is generally understood in our context. It is rather the action and reaction of various factors – physical, mental, socio-political, economic, psychological, attitudinal and so on. It could be described as a process in which women gain greater share of control over resources – material, human and intellectual – like knowledge, information, ideas; financial resources like money and property and control or equal share in decision-making in the home, community, society and the nation to gain 'power'. It means giving voice to the voiceless. The term has come to be associated with women's struggle for social justice and equality. It refers to a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. To have power is being listened to, being recognized and respected as equal human beings with a

capacity to make contribution to the society.

While we can take some satisfaction from the progress of women's education and also from the availability of equal opportunities to women for economic empowerment, there is a grey area so far as her human empowerment is concerned.

The structural inequality by which women are subjected to systematic injustice and violence has not been addressed to so far. The never fully articulated invisible assumptions by which a society has been operating have not been changed. These invisible false assumptions of a patriarchal structure of society are the main culprits. We have not yet deconstructed the cultural constructions of gender by which women are objectified and turned into worthless, powerless, invisible victims of violence.

In the estimate of a common person, women are not only to be used for sexual gratification but a constant mastery has to be maintained over them by men and the patriarchal families by the use of physical, emotional and psychological violence. Unless the mindset – its thoughts and perceptions that shape individual and collective beliefs, values and attitudes – ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling and analyzing undergo a correction, a positive change in the human empowerment of women is not possible. It needs an immediate co-ordinated response from academia, media, intelligentsia and the civil society at large to fight this menace and to change the mindset and ideology that tolerates and perpetrates violence against women.

Violence against women has been paradoxically on the rise ever since the process of her 'empowerment' began with modernization and now coupled with Global-

ization.

While conflict situations, communal tensions, ethnic deprivations and colonial situations have completely objectified women and inflicted indescribable sufferings on them yet there is a need to introspect and turn the gaze inwards to confess that all of us are also responsible in varying degrees for the rot within and need to rectify the mindset and the attitudes that perpetrate as well as condone violence against women in all subtle forms.

The UN General Assembly in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) defines violence against women thus: 'Any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private'.

This definition encompasses physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the general community including battering, sexual abuse of girls and girl child, dowry-related violence, rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional barbarian practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and at the work place and elsewhere; trafficking in women, forced prostitution and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state. It includes patterns of behaviour characterized by the misuse of power and control by one person over another. It can occur in mixed gender – relations and same gender relationships and has profound consequences for the lives of children, individuals, family and communities.

When I cast an impartial glance on my part of the world, I am greatly pained and disturbed to say that all these abuses take place daily in our midst except the female genital mutilation which is the sole 'prerogative' of Afro-Arab world.

Domestic violence includes wife-beating, dowry related violence, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children, verbal taunts, innuendos, insinuations, abusive language, emotional and psychological torture and intimidation. The same is true of violence at the work place including discrimination and black mailing. According to a recent survey, forty thousand marriageable girls could not get a match in Srinagar city alone because they are not economically empowered. The dark side of economic empowerment has been disastrous for women because now they have become saleable commodities.

Leaving for a moment Euro-American women empowerment ideas aside, because western women's movement and commitment to women's rights is only a century old. We, who are the proud followers of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) - even though pride is somehow out of place in these matters, should remember that fourteen hundred years ago, one of the prime movers of the Prophet's mission was to liberate women from the patriarchal tyrannical yoke and reinstate their human status. With him, it was an intellectual commitment, a great spiritual yearning actualized through a political movement to seek human justice for women and liberate them from the oppressive effects of male dominated society. He strove to build a just, peaceful and humane social order by bringing women on the equal human plane with men. So much so that he highlighted this mission in his farewell address, thus while addressing men: 'you have rights over your

women and your women have rights over you'.

We have only to renew our pledge to the Prophet and through him to God that we will follow Him in letter and spirit and try to eliminate all forms of violence against women and acknowledge their human rights to build a just, humane and peaceful society and thereby show the path of peace to the world in these violent times.

KASHMIRI SENTIMENT Sacrifices and Realism - A Synthesis? (May 30, 2008)

The speech Dr. Hameeda Nayeem made in a recently held seminar on the above topic in Silver Star Hotel in Srinagar.

Sentiment is a feeling or opinion based on emotions whereas what Kashmiris have been struggling for is an amalgam of sentiment and an inalienable right to determine their political future backed up not only by international recognition and legitimization but also by colossal sacrifices made by people for the past sixty years. It is not a mad irrational feeling which could be dismissed with disdain. For the past twenty years particularly, Kashmiris have offered sacrifices in physical, psychological and material terms. The sentiment has taken a solid body of its own for everyone to see. They have offered sacrifices of over hundred thousand lives, property worth billions, destruction and devastation of thousands of house holds and not the least sacrifices of the honour and dignity of women. The collective psyche has been bruised and battered; scruffed and scratched and has received indelible wounds. Over two hundred thousand people especially youth have been disabled in the current struggle and the entire population has become mentally sick with repression and oppression. At least 90 percent population has

sought psychiatric consultation in the past many years. Recently on a tour to Rajouri and Poonch, I have seen the scars people have been nursing because of the forcible, bloody division of Kashmir and are living in the hope that some day, they would be reunited with their brothers and sisters across the border. In spite of monumental sufferings people, on the whole, have not given up their struggle and aspiration to decide their own political future and manage their own affairs.

Now the question, the topic poses is, is realism compatible with the Kashmiri sentiment and sacrifices? The answer to this question will lie with whose perception of realism and to what end.

The dictionary meaning of realism is a way of seeing, accepting and dealing with situations as they really are without being influenced by your emotions or false hopes.

The modern philosophical meaning of realism is that it is not something static or independently and objectively available to anyone who looks for it because your language constitutes realism, the language which is chosen by your mind and the mind chooses words which embody its ideology – defined not merely as a set of ideas or values but a particular way of looking at things. Accordingly, the dominant discourse uses realism in the sense which best suits its ideology, blatantly oblivious of the whole truth and situation.

Its interpretation of realism is three pronged: first, that for the past sixty years Indian establishment has made such a deep penetration in Kashmir in every sense that it is impossible to turn the hands of the historical clock backwards. History cannot be changed nor reversed. Geographical boundaries are 'sacrosanct' and can't be tam-

pered with.

Second, Kashmir has to remain with India to strengthen her secular credentials and to preserve and protect the Indian Muslims. Third, Kashmir is not a homogenous community even though Muslim are in the majority. They can't be given the right to choose their political future for the sake of minorities.

Realism as perceived in the discourse of the dominated is that sixty years have elapsed since Indian occupation yet Kashmiris are more alienated now from Indian union than never before. Sixty years have passed but their urge for liberation has been intensified by Indian establishments' own repressive policies and manipulations. Sixty years have passed, but Kashmiris' indifference to India has turned into hatred. Sixty years have passed, Indian colonial and military occupation has become more and more obvious adding to the public wrath. Sixty years have passed but Kashmiris' are treated more and more like dumb-driven cattle; their policies and programmes are tailor-made for them in Delhi; their economic, environmental and water resources are looted, their lands are grabbed and what have you and all the rest of it!

It was not surprising when Pratibha Patil said while putting her foot on the Kashmir soil that she has come to encourage the army who are doing a great job (I wonder why people have reacted to her wielding of gun or giving her dose of Kashmiryat because being a woman she was at least more candid and honest about what Indian business is, in reality, in Kashmir. She did not use any guile to hide it and I appreciate her for that).

Now how would an impartial judge decide between the contesting perceptions of realism of the two dis-

courses? The judge has to base his judgment on who constitutes the most important component of a state to which other components are subservient. In other words, is it the physical control of the territory and the people through military might which should be given the status of the objective realism morally and legally because we are not living in a moral or legal void? This world, in spite of all its loopholes, has a moral and legal system in place. Or is it the people, the supreme substantial component of the state whose willing support for integration with Indian union is necessary for it to be part of Indian union?

Let us first dissect the realism of the dominant discourse. The assertion that history can't be changed or reversed or geographical boundaries are sacrosanct, goes against the testimonies of history. In fact, it was the disintegration of Soviet Russia which inspired Kashmiris to revive and intensify their struggle in early nineties and later the fall of Berlin wall and falling apart of Yugoslavia are recent cases of the changes and reverses in history and these have become possible because of peoples' sentiments backed by their rights which are universally recognized.

Another point of realism that the dominant discourse emphasizes is that Kashmir is needed for Indian secularism.

India as a democratic, sovereign, secular republic has the responsibility of protecting and preserving all its communities be they Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. Otherwise the label she uses for Pakistan can aptly be used for her as a failed secular state. (Many Muslims in India told me categorically that they chose India freely to be their nation as their Sufis and Saints are part of its soil, who always taught co-existence of different creeds and

colours). So Kashmiris cannot be made sacrificial goats for Indian Muslims. The third point of realism is that since there are other communities in Kashmir, Kashmiri Muslims cannot be given the right to choose a different political future. The impact of the dominant ideology has been such that few audible voices have contested the wild logic of keeping a majority hostage to minorities.

India being wedded to democratic principles cannot use postmodernist logic to sabotage the solution. In fact, it is her tacit, implicit and unarticulated acknowledgment of this primacy of public sentiment and rights which prompted her government over the years to make efforts to slice the broadly monolithic voice of Kashmir into bits and pieces and to change the demography of the State to problematise the democratic solution of the Kashmir issue.

The judge has to acknowledge that people are paramount and territorial control by force and the repression of people has neither moral nor legal standing.

However, the cool realism demands from some patience those who are dominated that the changes wrought by cruel history cannot be reversed overnight. Phased solution is the way out but the million dollar question is, does the Indian establishment publicly acknowledge the cool realism that public sentiments and rights are paramount and override any forcible control. This is food for thought for those who are overawed by the dominant ideology and its version of realism and devour its language and thought without questioning its basic premises. It is high time for Indian establishment to take realistic cognizance of the situation and address the issue before it devours many more precious lives and destabilizes of Kashmir and South Asia as a whole.

**INSTITUTE OF KASHMIR STUDIES
DEBATE
Colonial Politics (June 19, 2008)**

Two articles published in Greater Kashmir about IKS merit a serious concern, responds Dr. Hameeda Nayeem.

The two write-ups of M Ashraf on Institute of Kashmir Studies (GK June 1, 2008) and its rebuttal by Prof. R. K Bhat All About Kashmir Studies (GK June 12, 2008) deserve consideration. The kernel of M Ashraf's piece is his objection to the vision document which sets out the agenda for the Institute of Kashmir Studies thus: 'Historically Kashmir has been an integral part of the cultural mosaic of India and no study of Kashmir thought and culture is possible without situating it within the broader perspective of Indian thought and culture'. M Ashraf's assertion is that this is not only a travesty of historical facts but a brazen attempt to bulldoze Kashmir studies towards a non existent thought. Because even at the peak of its glory "Hindu" Kashmir did not have any significant interaction with north due to the basic difference in its religious philosophy and he gives analysis and examples from history to substantiate his take on the vision document. He is also objecting to limiting the scope of Kashmir studies under the garb of Kashmiryat as an attempt to reduce 'Kashmiryat to a peripheral, subservient sub-national identity of India'.

And there cannot be two opinions about it. What he pleads for is an all inclusive approach to Kashmir Studies where all the periods should be highlighted and not 'to dig out only the specific portions of our past which suit to a bigoted vision'.

Prof. R.K Bhat's response does not seem to be motivated by an objective and impartial historian's concern for objective facts of Kashmir History but by a loyal subject's urge to highlight, celebrate and sell the event's success to the colonial masters. Otherwise, the major chunk of his response would not have been devoted to highlighting the "grand" success of the event not one but two connected with the inauguration of the Institute. University being a government institution and its autonomy having been long eroded, had no choice but to do as ordered. So far as the musical extravaganza is concerned, young boys and girls had gone to see the performance of the Pakistani band and not to put their seal on Indian control on Kashmir, as it is ridiculously interpreted by those who support colonial rule. It has become a common place in Kashmir that any programme where people show up is taken as a reassuring assurance of people's support for Indian domination!

What makes the event 'suspicious' apart from the vision document, is the hype given to the re-inauguration and re-christening of an already inaugurated department. The University has been opening new departments every now and then and there are no events organized to mark the same. Advertisements are given in the newspapers about the admission in the new departments for the aspirants. Why did the central government poke its nose in Kashmir Centre bringing it under the rubric of South Asian foundation, and by inviting SAARC countries to be part of

its inauguration? This speaks volumes of the nefarious politics behind the move and Prof. Bhat's blowing the trumpet card of its resounding success, only reveals the sinister agenda.

M Ashraf is not right in naming it as a 'hidden agenda' as one does not have to labour for the obvious. Otherwise why should a 'historian' like Bhat concerned with the historical facts, be so enthusiastic and particular about giving the numbers of those who attended, the names of SAARC delegates and then defending the security measures and the inconvenience caused to the wayfarers and the neighborhood around the university campus? Why should he act as spokesperson of the university when not called upon to do so. The university authorities could have done it themselves had they wished to. How could a mega event involving the presence of some politicians from SAARC countries and the sufi extravaganza raise the level of scholarship as M Ashraf points out in his response? Unless it is used for suspicious political purposes?

Heuristic Resistance and its Lessons (July 12, 2008)

I wish Mani Shankar Aiyer were in Kashmir during the 10-day long valley-wide protests and resistance in every nook and corner of the valley, he would have to eat a humble pie, his complacent naivete would have come tottering down like house of cards on seeing the explosion of the pent up lava of repressed feelings of the people of Kashmir. Land issue was only an excuse. It provided catharsis to the repressed feelings and aspirations of people for their rights. He enraged many of us by his presidential speech in the "rechristening ceremony of Kashmir Centre". Emboldened by swelling audiences in the two functions organized to mark 'the event' he said that after the resounding success of two functions in SKICC and the varsity, there is now no major problem except 'chota mota grievance' which can easily be sorted out. Junoon band and the euphoric audience of young boys and girls had enraptured and enchanted him so much that he lost the sense of reality in the 'enchanted Prosperoan island of SKICC' – as if in 'a transcendental moment of speculation' he saw every problem dissolving away including the ticklish Kashmir conflict. He mistook school and college children for university students who had mercilessly grilled and embarrassed him in a seminar on 'Indian Fed-

eralism at Work' on 27th August, 2006. in the SKICC grand hall. I used to admire Mr. Aiyer for his incisive and brilliant analysis of events, his deeper understanding of problems, his sharp intellect coupled with measured and cultivated articulation in English language but that day I was totally disillusioned when he exhibited gross naivety and total misreading of the situation in Kashmir. He had been an advocate of the solution of K-issue through 'un-interrupted and uninterrupted dialogue' but this time he had made a volt face and seemed to be fazed and dazed by the presence of impressive audience in the two functions without trying to understand the reasons of their presence there.

He should have, as a seasoned politician, understood that people's presence in any function, even if organized by the agencies of government, does not mean they have given up their struggle for the fulfillment of their aspirations and attainment of their rights. It is ridiculous that the actors of Kashmir's 'peace politics' are ever ready to interpret people's presence even in so-called cultural shows, game shows or in the queues, where they line up to receive SIM cards for mobile phones, as a symbol of people's reconciliation with the Indian State government! Even the Indian media rushes to cover such gatherings as a triumph for the Indian state in the valley. They do not take it only as an indication of normalcy but as people's willing capitulation to Indian hegemony and abandonment of their struggle for the attainment of their rights; as if Kashmiris have to eternally abstain from every normal activity and routine work or any kind of public entertainment to make their displeasure loud and clear; as if people have to live in a state of perpetual self-denial to impress upon their 'masters' of their urge for release from

the dominant control. The cruel irony is that leaders of the resistance movement had also fallen in this trap while they used to pronounce adverse judgments on those who will either raise issues of economic, socio-cultural and environmental nature or on those who would go for any kind of entertainment publicly. This provided the stooge governments in the state, ample space and opportunity to follow anti-people policies and programmes and indulge in all kinds of manipulations whereby not only our lands have been grabbed, our jungles looted and deforested, our resources destroyed and exploited, our shahtoos industry devastated, leaving roughly 8 lac people without any means of living, our fruit industry devalued, our handicrafts degraded, electric power exported in spite of acute power scarcity in the state, our culture and history distorted because there was no resistance to the same. (I am conscious of the fact that culture is not something static but in a perpetual process of slow changelessness in change. I am not referring to its natural growth and momentum but to its deliberate distortions and disfigurements. I am also conscious that history is in a constant process of writing itself and that historiography is a vibrant discipline, otherwise the whole history would be reduced to one shelf but I find the postmodernist anarchist view lethal and disastrous whereby no historical fact remains sacrosanct. I firmly believe that fundamental historical facts are sacrosanct and cannot be tampered with even in the name of democratization of history or in the name of following the rigorous scientific method of exploration. Perhaps that is why even western world wants to go back to the age of reason and enlightenment when there was a sense of stability and firm conviction about the fundamental principles of this universe) Coming back to my point, any one who raised the issue of vital economic or

social relevance in the past 20 years was dubbed as a traitor to the movement. Last year on 5th July I participated in a roundtable discussion on the ecological vandalism and religious tourism in which experts gave opinions against the use of forest land for raising structures and against unregulated and unrestrained flow of religious and other tourists to the mountain areas including Amarnath Shrine so that ecological balance is maintained but no leader from the resistance paid heed. So much so that those intellectuals who think that we should not raise other issues till we get total Azadi, did not participate in the discussion and thought that it was a dilution of the resistance movement. I told one such friend that till the realization of that goal, everything else would have been taken away from us or destroyed, that certain things cannot wait and have to be taken on headlong, quoting Nelson Mandela that freedom can wait, not education but he thought I was a traitor to the movement. Similarly in another discussion on the socio-economic dimensions of Musharraf's four-point-formula, the reaction was the same. Most of the people present in the discussion, clung to the Azadi slogan and refused to look at the pragmatic benefits of socio-economic nature of the four-point-formula.

I wonder how the same leaders were compelled by people to take up the land issue as a matter of life and death and how this matter galvanized the entire population. Government has even before distributed and allotted land here, there and everywhere but no voices from the leadership were audible against the same. Journalists must bring forth all the facts about clandestine illegal allotments before public and get the orders reversed.

Now the crude lessons for India are:

1. Spending millions of money on individuals and

NGOs and one holding conferences and seminars to change the minds of people is an exercise in futility.

2. That she can never kill Kashmiris' sentiments and aspirations to get their right to shape their own destiny. The assembling of different voices is a devilish tactic and does not solve any problem as it is inherently against the democratic principles. These voices do not represent any one except themselves and cannot in any way be taken as people's representatives.

Indian government should never try to impose her own agenda on Kashmiris through hand-picked stooges or parties who masquerade as well-wishers and healers of the people of the state but are actually eradicating their roots. Be it through passing the PR bill or through allotting public land to one or the other agency or distributing jobs to their own workers and relatives taking anti-people decisions every now and then by manipulating the public will through deceptive slogans, while hoodwinking people in the broad day light.

A genuine way of winning the hearts and minds of people is not through parroting lip services and manipulating them in one way or the other but by fully empowering them. This time around government of India, in a rare act of self-definition, for the first time, reversed the unholy order in the name of a holy place. I appreciate her wisdom especially because her principled stand was fraught with electoral risks. The Government should continue the process of reversals by canceling all the legislations, Acts, laws and decisions that have eroded Article 370, an epitome of India's own constitutional guarantees to Kashmiris against the dilution of their identity and in-

ternal sovereignty including the anti-people draconian laws and extremely disproportionate presence of forces in the valley. These steps could lead to a reconciliation and pave the way for the final solution of the Kashmir problem.

3. To save the forthcoming elections from being sheer mockery and manipulation of democracy as it has been so far in Kashmir, let the government of India with one stroke of pen reverse the erosions of the special status of Jammu Kashmir and facilitate free and fair elections to empower people. This could clear the way for people's participation in it across the political divide and make it credible and truly democratic but without trying to sell it as a substitute of the solution to the K-issue.

Hurriyat and other resistance leaders should know that they received a fresh lease of life from the people's movement only when they joined hands to oppose the land transfer. They should realize that if they delay the process of reunification, it will be disastrous for them. They should remember that they are sitting on a pile of colossal sacrifices people have given to the movement. It is not only a matter of hundred thousand precious lives but the devastated families the dead have left behind, devastated localities, villages and towns and on top of all the bruised dignity of men and women; the desecration and demolition of holy shrines in the entire valley that has irreparably wounded the collective psyche. People have not endured all this for the making of one leader or the other, one party or the other. They have given their hot blood and sacrificed their comfort for the attainment of their right to shape their destiny. So the writing on the wall for resistance forces is to dissolve their separate cloistered

shells and their petty lusty egos in response to the public sentiment. Those who continue to oppose the joint programmes or strategies will be wiped out from the face of the political scene of Kashmir. The Indian collaborators should know that the days of deception are over. They can't throw dust in people's eyes any more. They have been thoroughly exposed even before those ordinary illiterate Kashmiris whom they used to deceive with one slogan or the other. They can't take decisions in closed door air-conditioned rooms. Thanks to some of the vibrant media persons who brought about public awareness about the unholy designs of these parties and committed media men must continue to intensify their campaign to unravel all the dirty acts of the governments before the public. I earnestly appeal both the electronic and print media to foreground issues rather than persons. Issues are vibrant and mobilize people for the attainment of their rights which contribute to the greater good of the society. Foregrounding persons and parties will only signal the death knell of the media because at present there is no one on the forefront who can instill confidence or inspire people!

An Open Verdict (Aug 22, 2008)

In any political set up, whether democratic or authoritarian, when people come out on the streets in huge numbers, protesting and demanding a total political change, a revolution is born as their voice is heard and respected. India being "the greatest and largest democracy on earth" has so far remained unfazed and unmoved in the face of the agonized and anguished cries of people for the right to shape their destiny. 17th August 2008 witnessed yet another moment and event in the history of Kashmir when at least one million people comprising men women and children came marching from every nook and corner of the valley to present a memorandum to the UN military observers group in Sonawar, Srinagar to ask it to intervene in Kashmir for a promised referendum. The fact of the matter is that a sea of people in RTC grounds and adjoining areas was a referendum in itself and if India bungles once again it will be disastrous not only for the whole of India but its echo will be heard far and wide. Prominent conscientious intellectuals of India have already suggested to the government of India to free Kashmir from the forcible colonial control. I congratulate them and appreciate them for their fair-minded and principled stand. Chief among these are Swaminathan, (Times of India) Vir Sanghvi, (Hindustan Times 17-8-2008) Mr. Dulat (NDTV) and not the least Arunadhathi Roy. Swaminathan (in Sunday edition of Times of India, 17-08-2008) in particular has reminded India of her double

standards so far as the logic of the partition of Pre-47 India is concerned. He has very convincingly drawn a parallel between the colonial rule in India by Britain and colonial rule of India in Kashmir and pointed out how the king of Junagardh who was a Muslim acceded to Pakistan and India objected the same and sent her army to Junagardh and annexed the princely state to India. In Kashmir the King was a Hindu and the majority of people were Muslims. But the government of India engineered an instrument of accession with the Hindu Raja against the will of the people. According to him even legalism evaporates into thin air in the face of ground realities and the ground reality is that overwhelming majority of the state is crying for freedom from India and they should be granted what they want. It is very disgusting that Arnub Goswami of (Times Now TV Channel) questioned "the irresponsible statement" of Arunadati Roy (what when she said on seeing a sea of people in Srinagar demonstrating for Azadi) that India as much needs freedom from Kashmir as Kashmir needs freedom from India and the question of representation was solved once for all because people represented themselves as political leaders have been rendered irrelevant. Arunadati Roy is one of the conscience keepers of India and asks her to introspect for all the evils and sins it has perpetrated in Kashmir. It is high time for India to listen to her conscience keepers lest it is too late.

However, for the sake of Indian nation which might have missed the basis of land controversy, I reiterate that the transfer of land is not to be seen within the paradigm of state discourse but within the discourse of conflict paradigm or dispute paradigm, if you like. Its parameters and terms of reference are provided by UN resolutions, sub-

stantiated by the presence of UN military observers group in Kashmir, the presence of Kashmir on all UN maps as a disputed territory, by the presence of Article 370 in Indian constitution as an epitome of the constitutional guarantees to Kashmiris against the dilution of their identity and internal sovereignty and the inclusion of Kashmir is-sue on the agenda for composite dialogue for settlement between India and Pakistan authored by BJP government. According to these parameters land in Kashmir cannot be sold or transferred to any non-state subject. Forest land cannot be transferred or sold even to the natives for saving the eco-system of the forest area according to international laws and even Indian Supreme Court ruling.

More so, it cannot be transferred to the Shrine Board even if constituted by natives because of the use the Board is going to put it to.

In the affidavit to the High Court of J&K in 2005 the Board has attached the following minutes when a writ petition was filed against the state government for not allowing the Board to supersede the state authority:

1. Erecting of LOC type fencing around the acquired land to isolate it from the rest of the valley.
2. To create the authority of shrine Board for the governance of this 'autonomous area'.
3. To erect permanent structures in the defined area with the voluntary financial help.
4. To create hydropower projects for the electrification of this area.
5. To construct a road from Baltal to Sangam and establishment of cable car etc.

And more disturbing is the judgment given in the case by the Single bench of Justice Promod Kohli, upholding

the board's right to defy the state executive and to go ahead with this agenda, clearly a communal agenda and the judgment too is against all norms of secular democracy and the supremacy of the state executive. This clearly means establishment of a new Hindu settlement in the area. The former Governor had already dissociated Muslims one by one from the pilgrimage beginning with the Malik family who had discovered the cave in 1860 and had been its custodians ever since, thus tearing to pieces the syncretism which the Amarnath shrine and the pilgrimage presented. He had already become an extra-constitutional authority, defying state government. He had turned pilgrimage over these years into a communal and commercial project that even ponnywallas were charged for carrying the pilgrims to the cave. He created havoc with the ecological balance of the area by increasing the time span of Yatra to two months and by allowing unbridled flow of pilgrims to the shrine. This led to untimely melting of the Shiv Lingam.

The detestable thing is that he played with the religious sentiments of Hindus by creating an artificial Shiv Lingam and later the marble structure to extend and strengthen his communal and commercial project! Many yatries have expressed their disgust for being cheated by this move.

Excessive flow of pilgrims has already led to the warming of Kolahi Glacier, the source of water to the entire valley. And if there was an iota of doubt about the communal project of S K Sinha, lo and behold, he was the special guest in a meeting called by L K Advani few days back where he gave briefing to BJP leaders about his 'unfinished Kashmir project'! In response to BJP representatives on different TV Channels who have been saying that

poor Kashmiris would like the Yatra to continue for the whole year because they live on it, let me remind them that in the middle of 2006 when the state government was going to outsource the Gulmarg land to NRI hoteliers and other native business magnates, it was the ponywallas and poor labourers of Gulmarg area who led the stiff resistance from the front against the outsourcing of land and said that they would prefer starvation to parting with the land in Gulmarg and destroying its eco-system. That should set the records right for those who are using insulting and degrading remarks against poor libraries and trying to burn the whole India with communal frenzy. The government had to retreat its feet from the proposed adventure!

In sharp contrast is the decision of BJP led government in Uttaranchal to restrict the flow of pilgrims to Gomuch temple to 150 per day to save Gangotri which falls in this area.

But Kashmir being the 'enemy territory' of 'anti-nationals' is to be destroyed in all possible ways, be it through unprecedented concentration of forces to control the life and death of people, or by grabbing their lands and shrinking their space or destroying all the forests and water resources of Kashmir or by manipulating them with tailor-made policies and programmes.

Our only hope today is the sensible Indian nation and its intellectuals to whom I make an impassioned appeal to join their voices to pressurize the Indian state to listen to the heart beats and agonized cries of Kashmiris to shape their own destiny before it is too late. I appeal to them to ask the government to desist from its oft-tested draconian and barbaric tactics to curb the rebellion and strangle Kashmiris' voice.

REVIEW

The Shadowlines in a Critical companion (Oct 30, 2008)

Amitav Ghosh, one of the great Indian English writers classified under postcolonial literature, is preoccupied with writing people's narratives, and documenting their memories which belie the official version of reality and history and nationalist meta-narratives of partition. This is in tune with his stated preference for human history as against the history historians write. The *Shadowlines*, his most celebrated novel, resonates with typical Ghoshian concerns, yet its narrative is a 'probing meditation on communal proclivities leading periodically to spontaneous combustion, on factitious frenzy and divisive tilt, on human lives spilling over national boundaries – their nation - based identities getting destabilized, says Murari Prasad in the introduction to the Critical Companion to *Shadowlines*.

Made from complementary narratives seamlessly interwoven – some personal, some historical, some traditionally fictional; the novel has the components of a paradigmatic postmodern text besides the defining characteristics of postcolonial fiction. By problematizing conventional take on received historiography and thematising suppressed stories from the marginalized, it adds postcolonial flavour to its theme. It displays postmodern

hallmarks in its treatment of the complex fictional material in a non-chronological memory narrative. Instead of probing individual psyche out of space and time "this type of novel attempts to project a vision of the individual under the community, the individual under the sway of larger movements of history (Mukherjee 24)". By confronting burning social and political issues of their times created by transnational, cultural, political and economical flows, these transnational writers deploy their sensibilities – one western, one homegrown, to engage in a dialogic relationship with society and to overcome restraints that de-radicalize the literary works of "the third world".

Nyla Ali Khan's paper on Amitav Ghosh's *Shadowlines* entitled "Citizenship in a Transnational age: Culture and Politics in Ghosh's the *Shadowlines*" which appeared in The Journal of Indian Writing in English (33,2 (2005)) has been included by Murari Prasad in a Critical Companion to the *Shadowlines* (2008). The paper raises some important points and hence deserves attention. It is important on two counts: 1. It is closer to the text as it penetrates the heart of the book and scoops up as much from there as possible. 2. It explores a kind of tension in the thematic vision of the book.

After the explosion and proliferation of critical theories, critics are often accused of imposing superstructures on to the literary works which are not warranted by the overall text of a book. Yet a lot of literary criticism thrives exactly on taking us farther away from the text and into a quagmire of hypothetical abstract framework of ideologies forcibly applied to the text.

Nyla's paper is a departure from such practice even though she does not fully extricate herself from the critical terminology associated with postcolonialism's critical

practice. Nyla is right in emphasizing that Ghosh remains engaged with his cultural and historical past throughout the novel by rejecting the process of historicizing the imperial past in favour of personal memory and imagination.

But she also argues that The *Shadowlines* takes a rather limited and restrictive view of nationalism by portraying nation as a political construct that breeds heinous crimes and relentless violence.

Characters in the novel are not portrayed as existential heroes pursuing spiritual journeys, as in Arun Joshi, to find their meaning in life through attaining epiphanies but characters moulded and confronted by their cultural and socio-political environment. His characters encounter a new world, a new cultural paradigm while retaining their recognizable forms of identity. This she has admirably brought to the focus. Ghosh's agenda according to Nyla is to threaten the safely guarded domain of privilege and power by demanding equality for human beings of all races, religions, cultures and ethnicities. By intermingling pre and post-independence India and Britain in the Second World War and their cultural and political paradigms and ideologies as also overlapping geographical divides, Ghosh according to her establishes the futility of all sorts of barriers or *Shadowlines*.

She also opines that what distinguishes this book from its sister novels of partition is its delineation of agonies and ruptures of the period in poignant detail. It also underlines the challenges of cultural dislocation and ambiguous citizenship and highlights the illusions of militant nationalism.

Two views of nationalism are juxtaposed in the novel: one of the unnamed narrator's nationalist grandmother

Tha'mma's who articulates in unambiguous terms the vital role of violence in the making of nations; another of a character in the novel who asks "why don't they draw thousand little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory (SL, 247). This juxtaposition generates new possibilities of meaning and understanding of history and challenge the falsified, rigidified, nationalist historical narratives.

Nyla contends that in rejecting the meta-identity of nationalism Ghosh seems to privilege a universalism that has been rejected for its hegemonic and manipulative power by many post colonial scholars. Because by so doing 'he might appear to belittle the nationalist struggles of dispossessed people in battling communities that need to assert themselves. 'Universalism is as shaky and shimmering an idea as nationalism and is too utopian to provide a genuine solution to the actual problems bred by nationalism'.

The *Shadowlines* narrates the story of three generations of the unnamed narrator's family, spread over Dhaka, Calcutta and London. The narrative begins in British India and concludes just after the creation of Bangladesh in late sixties. Tridib, a cousin of the narrator's father has witnessed the gruesome partition of India. He therefore, longs for a place where there is no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. The image in the mirror is a poignant reference to that segment of population that has either fled or has been made to flee to Pakistan.

The story revolves around Tridib, who is taken to England by his parents in 1939 at the age of eight and then

in 1964 dies a victim of communal frenzy in Dhaka. Narrator's knowledge comes to him through Tridib's recapitulations. The details of Tridib's death are given to him later by Tridib's brother, Roby and his girl friend, May Price. Price was a witness to the frenzy and violence that caused his death.

This horrific occurrence is linked with the catastrophic political events in England and on Indian subcontinent that the narrator tries to comprehend cohesively.

Through Tridib and his niece, Ila and their relationship with the Price family, the narrative captures the past by describing a London rent apart by WW II and then bounces back to the present by telling of a time when the narrator is a student in London. Besides Tha'mma with her childhood memories of Dhaka, the narrator takes the reader back to pre-partition era and through her fateful return to her original home in search of her uncle, thus making the reader aware of the disastrous consequences of the partition. The partition enables the disruptive forces of violence and displacement to tear the pre-existing cultural and social fabric so systematically that the process of repair has not even begun.

Nyla argues that the onus of the calamity engendered on 14th and 15th August does not lie entirely on the colonial power but on Congress and even Muslim League.

According to her Tridib's story is a defiance of meta-narrative because human knowledge will always be tentative and arbitrary. He inspires the narrator to construct his own narrative to avoid getting trapped in someone else's oppressive stories that reflect ethnic and religious jealousies and rivalries. If according to A N Koul the predominant theme of the novel is the crossing of frontiers of nationality, culture and language in three countries,

Nyla adds author's attempt to cross the barrier of citizenship as a self conscious political philosophy. He makes the reader aware of the human response to the ridiculousness of war, a response that transcends national boundaries and barriers.

But "universalism has often been identified with imperialist ideologies that purport to support a 'civilizing mission' that creates a totalizing or homogenizing" centre.

Nyla, thus, detects a tension between Ghosh's defiance of meta-narratives based on identity ideologies and his universalist vision which is at odds with post colonial theoretical framework and paradoxically closer to imperialist ideologies.

Nyla has brilliantly brought out the underlying implications of writing peoples' narratives from humanistic perspective and Ghosh's tendency towards universalism which under cuts the vary basis of individual narratives. Hence the chapter will be a great help in having a deeper understanding of the *Shadowlines*.

Of self-determination and Kashmir dispute (Dec 1, 2008) presented in Seminar organised by Bar Association.

Let me first of all rephrase the topic. Referendum and not election is the way out of the imbroglio I think by proposing this topic we are unwittingly and unnecessarily increasing the importance of the sham elections and confusing and mixing the different, distinct and disparate registers. Because there should be no doubt in the minds of educated and law-knowing people that election for the formation of adhoc government of the state or for that matter any state or country is fundamentally and es-

entially a separate domain of democratic politics and has nothing to do with the referendum for the right to self-determination which aims at determining the opinions of a community of people for their political future.

And yet the very fact that you have proposed the topic is because Kashmiris are compelled to do so as the government of India is selling elections as a substitute to referendum internationally. And in view of the claimed turn out of voters in the first and the 2nd phase of elections (not withstanding that these places are traditionally in the grip of heavy presence of army and that is why these places were chosen for the first and 2nd phase of election to generate the positive impression about the participation in elections), you need to educate the common people about what elections are meant for and how these are brazenly exploited by the establishment by presenting these as a surrogate to referendum. The two processes are separate and there is no mistaking the two. The exact democratic equivalent for exercising the right to self-determination is referendum to ascertain the views of people about their political future and this is what even those poor people who voted said in no uncertain terms when they were interviewed by Indian TV channels, that they have voted for roads, water, electricity, jobs and other day to day civic facilities and have in no way endorsed Indian control on Kashmir.

One could only cynically laugh at their naivete as if they are facing the farcical elections and its sham promises for the first time. They show primal innocence of the first man whom the angels are inviting:

*Khol aankhe zameen dekh falak dekh feza dekh
Mashriq se ubhar tey huway suraj ko zara dekh*

The candidates are promising them the paradisaal garden where the day to day problems would evaporate overnight. Needles to reiterate that a 'mature democracy' knowing full well, the purpose of five-yearly elections, is deliberately hoodwinking the world community when faced with her interrogative glance about the resolution of Kashmir issue.

Whenever the elections are announced for the state assembly, no claim is made that these are meant to determine people's views about Indian's continued grip over Kashmir nor is it mentioned in the "manifestoes" of the political parties contesting elections. Omar Abdullah has categorically said that these elections are held for solving day to day problems and India should not read too much into these. Therefore, what justification, if any, is there for the claim that Kashmiris have put their seal on the unjust, unequal and exploitative relationship with India. In fact, the bogus elections are themselves the worst kind of planned rape of the collective psyche of Kashmiris as these are not only enforced forcibly with the help of forces and the draconian laws but through these people are confused and divided along hundred different lines. On top of it, the top Hurriyat leadership and youth who would mobilize people against these deceptive elections, have been booked under Public Safety Act. The popular mainstream resistance voice has been totally strangled and the marginalized Pro-Indian elements are provided artificial oxygen by forces to call the shots and win the elections.

Otherwise also what is the importance of the state assembly more than an extended municipal committee- or implementing corporation with the entire top brass of bureaucracy, police and security structure from outside

who are the policy makers and decision takers and act as Viceroys of colonial power in Kashmir. The real power eludes the state assembly. Had it not been so, the autonomy resolution of NC would not have been put in the dustbin of history, to quote only one example out of hundreds.

Hurriyat's call for boycott is not visionary, to say the least, as it fell in the trap of government by unwittingly and implicitly accepting the government's fraudulent strategy to equate elections with the solution of Kashmir issue – that is referendum for the right to self-determination. Hurriyat's is an unthinking, unpremeditated and myopic approach knowing fully well that the government with the help of unprecedented concentration of forces and agencies, intelligence and otherwise, draconian laws, jingoistic nationalist media and the terrorized Kashmir media both print and electronic, and an awful repressive crackdown on Hurriyat leaders and youth, could manage big shows of queues of people waiting to vote outside election booths and this way hypnotize the world observers. Media here has been reduced to a handmaid of the government in giving partial bits of reality. It selects, distorts and constructs a false organic picture designed to show government's victory internationally and to strength its hold in the state.

What Hurriyat should have done and can still do is not to give a mere abstract call for boycott of polls but carry out a campaign to educate, inform and enlighten people about the reality of elections, what these are supposed to do for Delhi and how these are exploited not only to strengthen Delhi's base in Kashmir through local variants of Viceroys but also to deceive the world community in giving an impression that everything is hunky dory in Kashmir. That the candidates who canvass for votes

are unable to do anything because as long as there is political, manipulation and military control uncertainty, not even gods could alleviate Kashmiris' sufferings and render succour to them in their plight. That is how Hurriyat could have substantiated the boycott call, because ordinary, illiterate and half-educated poor mortals do not understand these layers and nuances of politics. They are given a feeling that it is a contest between candidates and personalities and between one camp and the other and not between two ideological stances about the political future of Kashmir and in a way take elections for what they are, in reality.

These are the feelings of an agonized insider rather than a harsh outsider because when the dominant power ostensibly succeeds in its deceptive tactics it inflicts an equal sense of defeat on those who resist the domination. Hurriyat responded to elections without properly understanding the contours of the given situation.

Another confusion which is related to the ideological divide is created by the use of language and denominators about the freedom struggle and its opposers. What is deplorable is that even educated people and columnists use denominators which are churned out by the state and which is expressive of its dominant ideology - like 'separatists' and 'mainstreamists'.

Kashmiris have not been given a chance so far to choose, either to be a part of India or otherwise, hence the question of separation or secession does not arise. In fact, the whole struggle of the past over sixty years is about the demand for the grant of that right. Therefore using the denominator of 'separatists' for the leaders or activists of resistance movement is to implicitly accept the government view that Kashmir is an integral part of India

and those who oppose it are the separatist rogue elements. Its sinister nuances, are more apparent in its Hindi equivalent - *Algawadi* - as it gives the impression of criminals.

'Mainstreamists' is another denominator which is unthinkingly used to designate those who are helping Indian interests in Kashmir (for whom the exact denominator would be collaborators). What a far cry from reality! By applying the term mainstream for them you are ironically accepting India as the mainstream - your mother country and all those who help her in Kashmir belong to 'Mainstream of Mother India' and those who challenge her domination are 'separatist elements'. If you are conscious of the workings of language and its impact and how it forms your concept of reality, you will realize how many of us have been co-opted become appropriated and willing adherents of dominant perspective from the confusion between election and referendum emanates. It topsy turveys one's understanding of things, and reduces the struggles, sentiments and opinions of the overwhelming majority of our state to the minority separatist fringe elements. In a recent write-up in Greater Kashmir a columnist called those leaders rogue elements who mobilized the people on land deal and eco-blockade. It is a case in which the person has been fully appropriated by the dominant language and thought, because he belongs to the resistance thought.

Therefore, without any fear of contradiction, I maintain that 'mainstream' in Kashmir is that overwhelming majority who are for the right to self-determination and the rogue elements are those who are working against the interests of the just struggle, be they outside the freedom camp or inside! And it is they who are unsuccessfully trying to mix the registers of referendum and election. I

would request the people and the writers and columnists to make the necessary correction in their logo.

The deluge of people who flowed voluntarily and passionately from every nook and corner of Kashmir and from all walks of life to TRC Grounds, Pampore and Eidgah in the month of August is the mainstream of Kashmir, who have given their verdict against Indian domination by any standards; against being held against their will and sooner than later their painful agonized cries will be answered by heaven as the universe is now opening towards Kashmir and the shameful, farcical and bizarre elections will only further expose the tall claims of democracy. By apparently going for a democratic process in the absence of all that is needed for a free and fair poll, the Indian's only strangulating and raping democracy. Democracy means people's power must ultimately prevail, here it is the other way round.

Recent statement of Barrack Obama is hope - energizing that serious efforts are needed to resolve Kashmir issue to free Pakistan from the hook so that it can wholeheartedly concentrate on the fight against terror on its adjacent Afghan border. Even if it is a statement driven by American self-interest rather than any concern for suffering humanity in Kashmir, yet our concern should be with the end result rather than the intention and one only hopes that Indian lobbying in America, which has come into full swing, at present, does not succeed in blurring Obama's clear vision about how to build durable peace in South Asia. Besides, his victory has not only overnight salvaged the sinking image of America in the eyes of the world in multiple ways but has opened a window of hope in the world that under his stewardship international politics and relations would be governed by the

universal principles of justice, democracy and fair play and Indian State cannot get away with her prevarications any longer.

The elections are no more than the theatre of the absurd - and even the actors know fully well what they are doing. All the main actors strongly deny that elections have any more relevance than that of forming a body for solving the day to day problems and have nothing to do with the resolution of Kashmir issue. The present absurd activities are, therefore, rendered meaningless by what the people are yearning for. What they yearn for nullifies the present, and elevates the yearned for future and the uncertainty of its coming is significantly reduced by all the favorable signs in the world and within India. Kashmiri's collective soul in agony would be released and so would Indian Conscience heave a sigh of relief in not very distant future! Insha Allah.

SPEECH

UN and the Right to Self-Determination (Jan 19, 2009)

Mr. Chairperson, first of all I seek your permission to be a truth-teller rather than a tranquilizer, given the things as they are because I have no words of comfort for you, I mean for the top Hurriyat leaders both within and outside the two factions of Hurriyat camp, though this time I will not take on those who are outside the camp and their antics and theatrics during the agitation.

Let me begin by interrogating the topic for the seminar and then go on to say how you miserably failed us when we were close to achieving our right to self-determination. Reminding UN of its commitments and asking it to implement the same is an exercise in futility as we have done so in the past without getting any dividends. UN resolutions are the basic document which endorse and legitimize our right to decide our political future and should be taken as the basis of our demand but let me dislodge your misplaced confidence in UN as a body that can implement these resolutions. Firstly, because it is already written off as a grand failure in addressing the issues of peoples' rights and demand for justice around the world. Secondly, it is a bonded maid of Euro-America and

they use it occasionally to serve their own interests and crush the rights of people and sovereignty of nations when it suits them as is duly testified by the recent world history.

It is the Indian people who could help us in getting us our right to determine our future and we have to invoke their conscience persistently. They almost did it this summer when they responded to our unprecedented protest demonstrations in very positive terms but alas it was the top 'leadership' in freedom camp that let us down who fumbled and stumbled and helped Indian establishment wittingly or 'unwittingly' in suffocating people's voice and scuttling the peaceful revolution with all the conceivable repressive measures. On seeing a sea of people on the grounds and streets of Srinagar and other parts of the valley and Jammu, top intellectuals of India advocated in unequivocal terms our right to decide our future and asked Government of India not to hold Kashmiris against their will. Sawaminathan Ayer, Vir Sanghvi, Jug Suraiya, Arundahti Roy and many others. Not only that. 59% respondents in a CNN IBN poll agreed to the demand for Azadi of Kashmiris and their right to secede from India. Besides, Omar Abdullah, then played a very positive role in highlighting the aspirations of Kashmiris and on acceding their demands by India. It was the sacred duty of freedom leadership to build on that, to broaden the support base in Delhi among intellectuals and Indian national political parties and keep up the momentum of the movement but most deplorably the leadership capitulated to the Indian State in several ways.

Yeh nadan girgayay sajday main jab waqat-e-qayam aya

Nay, hang on, not because of 'nadani' which one could

forgive but because of willing and naked capitulation to the authorities.

First, by recalling two members from (Coordination Committee) namely Nayeem Khan and Shabbir Shah who were spearheading the unity moves, which was an abject surrender before the demands of the dubious elements in Hurriyat for no other perceivable reason but to abort and scuttle the movement as they were out of it. Going by the phone calls, at that time, which people made to TV channels asking about the sudden, unwarranted and anti-movement decision, one can scale the disappointment in people who started smelling something fishy in the Hurriyat camp.

Secondly, by committing the historical monumental blunder of calling off the strike abruptly on the pretext of the month of Ramzan when people had girded up their loins and were ready to do or die for the attainment of the right to decide their future.

In this decision, Mr. Chairperson, you were not alone, you had the holier – than – thou chairperson of the other faction with you, who gives the impression of being 'always in communion with God and defending Islam,' 'infallible while branding everyone else as a traitor to the cause'. Both of you strangulated the revolution by calling off the strike call in September 2008. After your abject capitulation, there was selective crackdown on those who were the mobilizers and organizers of the public demonstrations, and the unifiers of Hurriyat, with the active connivance of black sheep within the Hurriyat Camp.

Both of you, particularly Geelani Saheb, committed another blunder after having served one week's imprisonment in posh hotels by describing the land issue as a

non-issue forgetting within no time, that the land issue had fuelled and rejuvenated the movement of the right to self-determination as also provided you fresh oxygen for survival when you had become almost defunct and redundant.

These series of bunglings greatly disappointed people and they started audible whisperings on the streets, in public places and in drawing rooms and started questioning not only your lack of commitment but your capacity to lead the movement. This was the turn around in the situation which your crass insensitivity to public sentiments and opinions missed, the public sentiment which you always invoke for your survival! People were disgusted with your leadership and found themselves in a deep sea of despondency not knowing what to do. How long could you take people for a ride and continue to commit blunders and serve your own selves? How long would you escape the public wrath? You stumbled when the iron was hot. You have taken people for granted. They had given you a fresh lease of life when you were faced with identity crises because of your acts of omission and commission. After this debacle, you made half-hearted, lukewarm statements which inspired none. It seemed you had already sung a dirge on your leadership, mind you, not on the movement. Then comes another thunderbolt from Geelani Sahib on his return from Delhi where he was convalescing, when he accused Sajad Lone of fielding a candidate in Kupwara district and then the latter's response to it in which he crossed all limits of civility, set people pooh phooeying you.

Instead of lambasting at the authorities for unprecedented curfews, arrest of leaders and the youth, Geelani Sahib chose petty squabbles with his own kind. Even if

Sajjad Lone had done what Geelani Sahib alleged, it was only one out of 87 seats, which could not have dented the boycott call in anyway. By his 'puritanical attitude' towards others, not for himself, mind you, he is frightening away not only minorities but also the well-meaning people from his own community.

In the midst of all this one faction of Hurriyat closed down all the fledging organizational structures of Hurriyat in districts, which could have given a body to the movement, a solidity of specification and helped in the implementation of boycott call.

Mere sloganeering and emotional demagoguery do not help in achieving solid objectives, it is institutional base which concretizes your objectives, plus humility, accountability and transparency which engages people and not mere shallow statements by one and appeal to religious sentiments by the other.

And when elections were announced, you once again gave a clichéd boycott call, being frigid of new ideas, you had not learnt from past experience of 1996 and 2002 when Government of India managed to impose a government on us and boycott calls fully helped pro-establishment elements to strengthen their base. The popping up of Peoples Democration is a direct result of your boycott calls because people had no other alternative which you could have provided by defeating the colonial power with her own weapons or even if you were made to lose you would have got connected with people.

Once again you fell in the trap of identifying elections with a sort of referendum for Indian control on Kashmir or so it was presented by Government of India.

Having already disappointed people enormously

which you missed in your perceptual blindness, the less politically conscious and under-privileged out of anger did not heed your boycott call, to show their disappointment with you.

They knew you could be of no avail to them as you are neither clear in your understanding of the issues involved nor capable of leading the movement. Geelani Sahib is too busy in issuing fatwas, others in ego tussles and power politics within and outside Hurriyat, yet others in increasing the graph of personal profiles, by appearing in the media every now and then while throwing the interests of the people to winds.

People to you are an expendable a material as they are to the Indian State and its establishment. You did not feel the agony and pain of the families who lost 60 sixty precious dearest souls and bread-earners and of 2500 youth who have been crippled and disfigured for life. It meant nothing to you. People from all walks of life were ready to contribute for their welfare and I wrote at that time that Hurriyat or Co-ordination Committee should form a committee to collect and distribute aid to the victims and the devastated families. But as usual there was no response from your side.

People knew you could not get your act together given the so-called forum politics and wretched collective leadership mantra. Those who boycotted the polls did it out of their own volition. Having a raised political consciousness they knew their vote could be misinterpreted by Government of India in the presence of boycott call and those who are less fortunate and illiterate were taken in by the rhetoric of development, and voted for the administrative promises and not to endorse status quo in Kashmir, as I have explained in my earlier write-up.

Geelani Sahib did not realize for all these years that human life cannot be suspended, it needs governance on daily basis and there has to be some structure that will do just that and elections have only that limited mandate. Larger issues like Kashmir dispute which have far reaching consequences are decided by referendum, he did not realize that unless the body is taken care of, it cannot think of freeing the spirit. Mehjoor says:

*"Ye Azadi chehh sorgich hoor ye phereya
khaane pate khaanai"*

Unless the belly is gratified one cannot crave for the luxury of freedom. This reality dawned on him too late when much had been lost for him as for Kashmir.

If people voted under whatever circumstances they still showed the wisdom of separating elections as an administrative affair from larger political dispute of Kashmir. And all the actors of the election have declared the same and now if GOI is celebrating the victory of elections in Kashmir as legitimization of her control on Kashmir, she is suffering from self-deception. If she really believes in her own fictions, let her have a referendum tomorrow and put a final seal of her control on Kashmir forever.

This vote was, therefore, also in part, a rejection of divided, myopic, passive and decadent leadership, out of concern for a new vibrant, dynamic, inclusive, indivisible and pragmatic leadership.

If you want to continue as so-called leaders in spite of all this, it is high time for you to introspect and take cognizance of the historical blunders you committed and make an agenda for this year because whichever new government comes in Delhi after the forthcoming general

elections, cannot put Kashmir on the back burner any longer. They have to take it by horns and you should be ready with an agenda of what you will dialogue about and achieve this year.

1. Apologize to people and selflessly make one broad party with one leadership, dismantle the present hierarchical structure and let those run the movement who are committed and capable of doing so and let others gracefully pack up and go and rid this movement of inertia sickness, of petty bickerings, of paralysis of action and monotony of ideas, and much much more of the same stuff! The present state of affairs is a travesty of movement which means flow, kinetic flow rather than static arrest.
2. Demilitarization and internal sovereignty should top your agenda for the first phase.
3. Spell out clearly in written form the safe guards for the rights of minorities like Pandits and Sikhs. Make every effort to bring back our Pandit brothers and sisters who are living a miserable life in Jammu camps as they have been much abused by politicians across the political divide.
4. Bring on board all the three regions and give them written assurance of proportionate equitable distribution of resources and jobs. Look into their real and imagined fears.
5. Clearly Geelani Sahib's ideology will not work. If you are really interested in keeping the whole state together then make your agenda inclusive, a state that has more than 30% cent non-Muslims can't have Azadi Barai Islam as a slogan. Prophet of Islam never taught us to coerce people into submission.

sion or to force any system on people which they are not ready to accept. Prophet of Islam allowed his vision to grow naturally in the midst of people.

If you insist on the actualization of your ideology in political terms, then what is the difference between you and Sangh Parivar who are also trying to impose their ideology on the whole of India where Muslims and Christians form a sizable minority?

We always castigate them for trying to impose tyrannical and oppressive majoritarianism on minorities. Your refrain of Azadi Barai Islam has also been frightening away minorities and they are skeptic about their future in that kind of setup even though you may give hundreds of guarantees to the contrary.

Secondly, the concept of Ummah today is an utopian dream which doesn't exist anywhere. If the sovereign powerful Muslim countries of the world are not united and do not do anything for Palestine and other repressed Muslim of the world, what can hapless, helpless and besieged people of Kashmir do to help your dream of Ummah to become a reality and who is going to accede to that demand? If you really want to serve Islam, reform the people at every level to make them good, practicing and conscientious Muslims who could really help stem the corruption at all levels, be it social, political, moral, intellectual or economic which could make Kashmir an example for others to follow. If, even after getting what we want, people are the same, the Azadi could become sour within no time as it did in India and Pakistan!

PS: Yes I forgot to remind Chief Minister Omar Abdullah of his promise of releasing all the political prisoners the moment he takes over. What has happened to that promise?

A Protocol of Grief (June 20, 2009)

The gory and gruesome incident of gang rape allegedly committed by at least 14 persons of the meritorious teenager Asiya 17, and her pregnant sister-in-law, Neelofar 22, and their subsequent murder by torture, sends shivers down the spine and has the potential of shaking humanity in its entirety, but did not stir the government of India or Indian media till the entire Kashmir was on the boil for ten days. The State government's initial utterly crass response and later its dithering and flip flop have only confirmed the public perception of its trying to shield the criminals who are invisibly visible to the eyes of the people. What re-confirms Indian colonial attitude to Kashmir is her belated impotent response to this tragedy not to talk of the criminal silence of human rights groups and human organizations who could have at least for the sake of integral mantra displayed emotional unity by joining the issue with Kashmiris! Their silence reconfirms their complicity with the establishment as they appear to be a travesty of what they claim to stand for. What is worse, the government, its agencies and Indian media through a calibrated dominant discourse are making people feel ashamed of and sorry for raising their voice against these crimes against humanity by bringing in the economic discourse as if it is a shameful, disgraceful, punishable and anti-people act to protest. (By the way it is the result of the dominant discourse which has immobilized and 'neu-

tralized' the intelligentsia so much that it distances itself from any voice which rises against the repressive State, its gross violation of human rights and the cry for the resolution of Kashmir issue as a panacea for major ills that are afflicting our motherland. Otherwise it would not have taken so long for Kashmir University teaching faculty or other organizations to frame their response to this terrible heart-rending crime.

This class has lost its own independent initiative and perceptual capacity of taking in the reality around them. They can't see the blatant and subtle manipulations to which Kashmiris are subjected to every now and then. They had to wait for Mr. Geelani's wake-up call! The university which is supposed to lead has been reduced to a handmaid of the establishment over the past twenty years. Nothing could be more repulsive than the 'conscience keepers' of the society remaining dumb in these situations which have been recurring time and again in this forlorn and deserted spot on earth! It is the immobilizing torpor of the university and the literate class in general which has reduced politics across the political divide to what it is today. Freedom struggle would not have become a sort of industry for traitors from within to manipulate it to serve their vested interests and to scuttle the organized and coordinated rights' movement. They would not have monopolized the movement and eroded it from within had the university acted as a watch dog not only of the government but of the resistance movement as well. Its role is not only to strengthen the rights' movement but to carry out a sustained critique of the freedom camp and inform people about the limits of their tacit mandate, in short to bring both the government, its opposition and the Hurriyat camp under a public scanner so that they do

not exploit any situation for their own ends, become inhuman and undemocratic and resort to corrupt practices of all kinds. The traitors from within would not have established in freedom camp and hegemony suppress the genuine voice and followed their own agenda). After this digression, and 'and a futile one at that', I am well aware of it, still one must continue crying, it has at least therapeutic value, let me come back to the point I was making. The government showed apathy and utter disregard of the bruised public psyche and sentiment in the wake of this tragedy. Instead of pacifying the public and ensuring justice to the victims and promising removal of forces from the valley, it started accusing the freedom camp and the opposition for instigating the public. The opposition could have tried to take the political mileage out of the incident, being recently defeated, but this was not true of public or any resistance activist. There is no justification whatsoever for the government to either make use of force to quell the uprising against crimes and the forces' presence nor to subject leaders and activists to illegal and punitive detention in the scorching heat in the various jails of Jammu province. The protest was initiated and led by people and continues to be so (knowing, that, for genuine resistance leaders and activists it is a great crime to raise their voice and sympathize with people in the hour of need) before the government.

When the incident became known to the residents of Shopian, thirty thousand people protested on the roads of Shopian while there was no leader or activist around from any camp. Notwithstanding the distorted and disfigured slogans given by the opposition party to draw a political mileage, the government should have at once listened to the people's cry for justice and taken appropri-

ate steps to hit at the root of the problem and ensure the identification of the guilty and their exemplary punishment. Chief Minister should have paid a visit to Shopian to express his solidarity with the bereaved family and insured personally that justice will be done at any cost, in the broad day light, instead of speaking from the TV studio and that too belatedly. Instead, the government tried to go against the very demands of the people by not only using brute force to put down the demonstrations but went ahead with unwarranted and uncalled for punitive detentions. I had great hopes that the present dispensation would not resort to the draconian and inhuman methods to suppress the voice of dissent and protest against the crimes against humanity. But that didn't happen. It is highly deplorable. It seems as if state administration is working at the behest of traitors from within the Hurriyat and is inhaling carbon dioxide from them mistaking it for oxygen – not knowing that their affinity with them will erode the credibility of the government, if there is any.

The root cause of the ongoing gross violation of human rights, as every one knows, is the super abundance of the army and other paramilitary troops and the special branches of J&K Police like SOG and Task Force in every nook and corner of the valley and parts of Jammu, their being empowered with draconian laws like AFSPA and PSA etc. People have been raising their voice against the same every now and then but who cares for people in this forgotten part of the world where people are only used as cannon fodder and as grist to the mill of politicians. Without falling in the trap of not taking any step which coincides with the distorted slogans of PDP (it is a known fact that PDP has been taking up every public slogan and distorting, twisting and disfiguring it from its original shape

to suite its own politics of deception) government should impress upon the centre to pull back all the troops military or paramilitary from the valley as there is no justification for their presence except the ones which were in the barracks before 89 immediately without any delay, (militancy has been almost wiped out according to government reports and only six to seven hundred militants are there who are also defunct) identify the culprits and give them exemplary punishment and release all the prisoners booked under PSA without offering any excuses. Even while the public mobilizers are under punitive detention, the people continue to protest and swear not to rest till the guilty are identified and punished and forces are removed from the entire civilian area of the valley. Government must at the same time disband SOG and Task Force and take steps to sensitize Kashmir Police to human rights and the safety, security and the dignity of the people.

However, I feel that the so-called leaders and politicians need a greater dose of sensitization at least about protocol of grief and mourning because if they were not thick-skinned and instead insensitive to public suffering and sentiment they would not either ride on the human shoulders while ostensibly protesting against Shopian tragedy! Nor would they celebrate ministerial berths with great fanfare while the entire valley was mourning the desecration and devastation of two budding flowers in Shopian. Otherwise also there is not much to celebrate and rejoice over in the valley of tears, blood and heart-break!

Book Review

Outsider's Analysis, Insider's Critique (Aug 8, 2009)

Name of the book: *Islam, Women and Violence in Kashmir Between India and Pakistan*

Author: Nyla Ali Khan

Pages: 185

Price: 395

The book under review is simultaneously a chronicle of turbulent Kashmir, a narrative of family history, an insider's critique of NC (National Conference), an outsider's objective analysis of the landmarks of Kashmir history of the 20th century seamlessly blended together into a unified whole. It is above all a complex and fractured history of women's paradoxical empowerment and objectification by the competing patriarchal, secular and fundamentalist nationalisms. Nyla is like an intradiegetic narrator in the book who has no part in the story but is closely associated with its prime movers and a witness to its violent history.

The book is divided into five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion plus an 'Afterword' by Ashish Nandy, an eminent postcolonial theorist.

The first chapter deals with the conflicting political discourses on Kashmir, Partition, Plebiscite, Autonomy and

Integration. She has admirably transcended the partisan perspectives and tried to dig out the truth of Kashmir tragedy for the western audience which lies submerged today due to an invasion by a plethora of books by outsiders representing dominant discourse. She has taken recourse to standard objective sources and oral history to substantiate her conceptualization on Kashmir history since 1931 and postcolonial and feminist critical idiom to structure her perspectives.

Chapter 2nd is on cultural syncretism of Kashmir and appropriately begins with Lal Ded's famous Vaakh:

*Shiv Chuy Thali Thali Rozan/Mou Zaan
Hyound Ta Mussalmaan*

It dwells at length on how Lal Ded of the 14th century challenged patriarchal and hierarchical society of her times substantiated by the renditions of the appropriate portions of her poetry; on how she laid the foundation of a new society of peaceful co-existence which was later nourished and concretized by Sheikh Noor-Ud-Din Wali popularly known as Nund Reshi.

But while her notion of Kashmiriyat is all but a decentralized concept devised by Sheikh Abdullah as a strategy to establish a separate Kashmiri identity (which is substantiated even by Mridu Rai in her book on Kashmir Hindu Rules, Muslim subjects), yet Nyla has overlooked how this coinage has been appropriated in the recent times by 'unionists' to achieve a different objective.

In the 3rd chapter she discusses the political debacles beginning with Sheikh Abdullah's unceremonious deceitful dethronement in 1953 and installation of a puppet government of Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad who engineered most of the erosions of autonomous status of J&K

and its culmination in 1984 in Farooq Abdullah's summary dismissal. She concludes it by pronouncing a judgment on her grandfather thus: 'Despite the furious opposition of his detractors and the relentless efforts by the government of India and Pakistan ... to dismantle the paradigmatic political and cultural structures built by him, his significance as a symbol of Kashmiri's unique cultural identity and its stentorian demand for right to self-determination remains indelible'. However, she does not have any words of comfort for his inheritors who delimited the influence of NC by its alliance with Congress and by committing many more blunders.

The 4th chapter entitled 'Militarization in Kashmir', gives an in-depth analysis of how the treacherous and torturous politics of New Delhi in Kashmir paved the way for armed insurgency, responded to by GOI with unprecedented militarization of Kashmir. This was coupled with the promulgation of draconian laws providing immunity to the forces and legitimization of gross violation of human rights of the populace.

The disillusionment and a sense of disenfranchisement created by New Delhi's machinations and the collusion of Farooq's regime with it generated a new phenomenon in when young boys crossed LOC in search of ammunition and combat training. The distrust and neurosis permeating the relationship between Delhi and the valley intensified the conflict. That is why militant resistance was complemented by huge demonstrations in support of independence which surfaced in every part of the valley. 'The cry for independence pierced the stifling atmosphere and goaded people to march on with abandon along the uneven streets of various parts of the valley' but as usual was crushed with draconian methods. The armed insur-

gency in the state has gone through a series of phases since 1990 but repressive military and political force remains a constant brutal reality, says Nyla. She has also given examples of the communal turn of the insurgency which culminated in the sad and tragic exodus of Pandit brotherhood from the valley. Here I differ with her. It was not a communal turn but was exploited by the then governor for its communal potential.

Chapter 5th, entitled: *Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender, Community and Nationhood*, contains the main thesis of the book. It begins with the description of the militarization of Kashmiri culture, occupation of the civilian space by para-military troops and army which has shrunk the civilian space, problematised the freedom movement and thought of the populace. The anarchy that pervades the cultural and political fabric of J&K has been stoked by government sponsored militants and 'foreign mercenaries', which has rendered women psychologically incarcerated and unable to lead an autonomous life, because of the pressures the people of the state have been subjected to since 1947. The inference which she draws is that 'within a masculinist discourse and praxis, the rigidly entrenched hierarchical relationship between men and women is inextricably linked with sexualized violence'.

Besides, in this chapter, the author traces the evolution of political and economical empowerment of women from the days of the tribal raid to the present conflict period when women have been compelled by the situation to withdraw from the communitarian public space to the private realm as they are caught between competing patriarchal and fundamentalist nationalisms. Still there are oases in the desert in terms of courageous women who

speaking truth to power.

The only reactionary women's organization according to Nyla is DM (Dukhtaran-e-Millat) which claims that the image of women as a burqah clad, faceless, voiceless, cultural icon, is sanctioned by the interpretation of religious scriptures and uses intimidation and questionable tactics to stop 'immoral activities' of the populace. The organization advocates the creation of homogenous culture devoid of the freedoms that Kashmiri women have traditionally enjoyed. But the good thing is that its agenda is not subscribed to by the majority of Kashmiri women.

Nyla concludes that there is no doubt that during the past two decades Kashmiri women have been driven by violent circumstances in the vanguard and have been fighting battles of all kinds of injustices and crimes against humanity committed by the State and by some dubious non-State actors. The cruel irony is that in the process most grassroot women have been economically exploited and physically defiled.

At the social level the attitude of women seems to be a strategy of survival in a social setting in which relationships are hierarchically structured, maintaining social and political stasis. Nyla's theorizing on women's empowerment involves cognitive, psychological, economic and political aspects.

Towards the end the author advises the future researchers on this subject to make a distinction between traditional praxis that conscripts the roles of women and progressive roles prescribed for women within Islamic norms. Because the western pre-occupation with empirical observation has led to an inaccurate conflation of Islamic norms with practices.

Hence western feminist epistemologies can impair the research paradigms, hypothesis and fieldwork on women in Islamic societies. This is an important observation because the confusion about women's position in Islam is created by mixing the registers and by the thoughtless application of western paradigms in Islamic societies. The valorization of a naturalized female "difference" ultimately denies the diversity of feminist praxes and theories around the world rooted in specific material histories of empire, nation class, ethnicity, religion even as it glosses over the imperialisms' inherent conflating a western feminism with women's struggles in the third world. This shows that even though Nyla is a diasporic feminist who returns periodically to the native country, not to teach imported theories and ideologies, but to advocate the application of indigenous paradigms. This lends authenticity to her voice.

The book alternates between a gripping narrative of colossal Kashmir tragedy and a scholarly conceptualized piece of work in spite of appearing anecdotal and episodic at some places and hurriedly written at others. Yet the underlying cohesive pattern is provided by the overall tortuous history of Kashmir and the resilience of its inhabitants. In terms of methodology the book is well written, combining traditional sources with oral historiography and email responses to some of her queries from some eminent persons. No research methodology is ideologically innocent or technically sacrosanct as I have learned during my sojourn in Harvard University. Nyla has tried her best to steer clear of ideologies in search of truth about Kashmir imbroglio. She ends the book by expressing a wonder whether the powers that be will ever wake up to the tragedy of Kashmir and make an honest effort to end

it for a new dawn in South Asia! To conclude, the book is important on two counts: one, it is scholarly work written by a Kashmiri woman and an insider of Sheikh family (synonymous with Kashmir History of half a century) who dares to speak truth to power and secondly it is corrective of the flawed views on Kashmir perpetrated by dominant discourse both Indian and western. It is an important addition to the dominated discourse and therefore highly recommended.

Kashmir: The Way Forward (Aug 12, 2009)

This paper was presented at a Seminar organized by GK Foundation Srinagar.

Without taking recourse to evasive religious or 'intellectual' discourse let me straightaway come to the ticklish topic.

However, before stating what is the way forward on Kashmir, it is imperative to examine what steps have been taken so far to address the issue which have failed to produce the desired results by the government of India:

1. First of all, the government responded to insurgency with military might taking it as a law and order problem. It used all imaginable counter-insurgency tactics to quell the uprising but miserably failed to make the people submit and surrender before the military power. Even the use of renegades could not break the will of people to fight for their rights.
2. Secondly it used a huge propaganda machinery co-opting half backed intellectuals and imbedded journalists to change the mind-set of people as also abused democratic processes and institutions to the same end. Ironically enough people have only been awakened from dormancy of ignorance and credulity and became more and more conscious of

their rights.

3. Delhi also tried to sell elections as a substitute of referendum but time and again people have made clear that the two processes are separate and designed for different purposes. Elections are meant only to put a time bound government in place which could meet day to day requirements of the people as human life cannot be suspended.
4. It also tried by all means to turn people away from supporting militancy and to struggle peacefully and politically. It succeeded in doing so but paradoxically by so doing helped in the evolution and the maturing of the peaceful political struggle which has unleashed unprecedented people's power on the streets of Kashmir. This was demonstrated by them from last June onwards, be it over the land row in Gulmarg and Pahalgam, or over economic blockade or the opening up of Muzaffarabad road and currently against the terrifying Shopian and Baramulla atrocities. All these agitations naturally boil down to the slogan of 'freedom' as the absence of which they perceive to be the root cause of the ills afflicting people and the body politic of Kashmir.
5. The Indian State used yet another strategy to problematize the forward movement on Kashmir and strengthen status quo by attempting to intensify and overemphasize the religious, social and regional diversities through devious methods. It desperately tried to create more and more wedges and 'interest groups' who claim 'to be the stakeholders on Kashmir'. This nefarious design to marginalize the grand bloody narrative of Kashmir has got into its loop 'NGOS' and 'Kashmir ex-

perts' from within and without the state, used to diffuse and disperse the broadly monolithic voice of Kashmir.

6. The two round table conferences seemingly designed to make a forward movement are an ample demonstration of this design where blizzard of view points are allowed to be voiced which were purportedly assembled to confound and confuse; to marginalize the master narrative of Kashmir and drown the few dissident voices invited from freedom camp in the babble of voices supportive of the status quo in Kashmir. Had it not been so, the working groups' recommendations would have been implemented long ago because Hurriyat did not participate in these conferences though they could not fully articulate their reasons for not participating when invited yet it was tacitly understood that RTC was designed to drown their dissent.

Even if we take this step as a serious and sincere effort, it is a very flawed one because it is nothing but the application of postmodern political model to a situation which demands an intrinsically democratic solution.

If the government persists in using this model, it has to begin by redefining the very idea of India based as it is on the secular and democratic principles (because the postmodern model is anarchic and creates a colossal confusion by putting contesting narratives together to create a chaos to puncture any solution). This point was also raised by Jug Suriya in his column in one of the national Dailies last August 2008 of majority holding the key to any resolution. In any democratic setup problems are solved on the basis of democratic principles (probably 17

August Times of India). Besides, democracy has been the inner logic of history. It bears witness to the fact that communities and nations often resort to simplest solutions to their problems. Solutions to most complex problems are usually simple in both mathematics and politics. When we do not have the will to solve the problems, we compound them by approaching them through devious routes or just pretend there are no solutions. Sectarian feuds in both religion and politics are solved best by transcending the very sectarian approach and not by working out some formula of keeping all sects pleased. When many vultures attack a single prey, none of them finally gets it. 'Manufactured' and manipulated sectional views distort the original pristine reality because when the stake-holds are many, we are faced with epistemic dilemma. And it is impossible to get out of that impasse where there is no genuine democratic norm applied to determine the truth-claim of each. Therefore, epistemic sovereignty within a context of democratic postmodern set-up is best appropriated in referendum. The soul of democracy is that the will of the majority must prevail but let me hasten to add that it is not oppressive majoritarianism which is allowed to carry the day. There are inbuilt safeguards for minorities in any truly democratic set-up as are enshrined in the Indian constitution. So shall they be in any future dispensation of J&K.

A government is formed even when the winning party get only 51% seats and the remaining 49% have to respect the verdict and do not say they are unrepresented in the government because that will be a negation of the underlying principles of democracy. In the last US elections the loser did not only accept defeat but offered all the help to the victorious candidate in the dispensation of

his duties.

Assembling different voices cannot even synthesize different perspectives. That synthesis is only a dream, an impossible dream as we have seen in case of India before independence. Muslim League and Congress, in spite of their best efforts, could not forge a unity.

The dispute of Kashmir is basically the dispute over the hermeneutics of representation of political sovereignty. If sheikh Abdullah could have been the representative of Kashmiris unproblematically, there would have been no legitimacy in raising the issue after his death. In fact renewed pal resistance interrogated his right to make a pact as it does not satisfy the basic requirements of the right to self-determination even in a modified and reinterpreted form.

The spin doctors in India have been stressing that it has to be a wise win situation for all the three parties. This position is morally flawed because it brings the dominant and dominated at the same level as if Kashmir is merely a piece of land to be equally distributed and humans and human rights are an expendable material to be disposed off at will. A solution, that is acceptable to both India and Pakistan and to Kashmir is morally vapid, a semantic absurdity and logically a contradiction in terms or at best tautological of the fixed ossified positions. Though here I must hasten to add that General Musharraf did move away along with the majority of Pakistanis from the frozen embrace of the past and made a paradigmatic shift from dispute centric to people centric approach and publicly declared that it is primarily the satisfaction and aspirations of Kashmiris which are of paramount importance. India, on the other hand, seemingly continues to live in the prison of the fossilized past and nothing short

of her continued military grip on Kashmir is acceptable to her. In fact, railway project and the proposal to make residential quarters for army in the state, further shrinking the space of already besieged Kashmiris, these are a demonstration of the sinister designs of the Indian State and have added fuel to the public anger and strengthened their resolve to intensify the peaceful struggle.

So the way forward has to be a departure from these failed steps and an honest admission and acknowledgement of the epistemic sovereignty of people's struggle. The way forward is to break the status quo by taking sincere and honest steps to address the issue and not to wriggle out of it which could only lead to monumental disaster.

I see great merit in Musharraf's proposals for breaking the status quo because his proposal barring one point is imbued with pragmatic sagacity. The arrangement worked out on the broadest definition of these proposals between India and Pakistan could have sanctity and viability only when ratified by Kashmiris through referendum and endorsed by third party for making it binding on parties and safeguarding it against erosion in days to come.

Now the bare skeleton outline of the proposal which defines only the broad contours should be given body by Kashmiris. Here I must add that the bottom-line has to be complete and absolute internal sovereignty. This will solve the problem of who will represent Kashmir on the peace table. To me self governance means the substance complete internal and sovereignty of freedom without a separate territorial or international selfhood. Internal sovereignty must include all the administrative, legislative, security and judicial powers. Only the external dimension

of foreign affairs should remain with Delhi and Islamabad.

Demilitarization has to be of the entire region from across the LOC and if India needs some forces against China those could be safely deployed in Ladakh. Soft borders must mean free flow of people and goods and not truncated flow as we have today because that has mostly put people off from traveling across. Some opinion makers suggest that free borders and people to people contact is the way forward but I want to ask them: could opening of the border be a substitute for what people have been demanding for, a right not only to truly govern themselves but also have free and fair atmosphere to breathe in and to have respect for human dignity and human rights. It is the disempowered people who are dying on the streets every day. So the primary need is to empower them and to let them live a free and safe life away from the forces who are controlling them now and a life free from pol eco and cultural manipulations.

India needs to re-conceptualize her nationhood to make room for Kashmiris' aspirations which have taken an archetypal form, shape refusing to die down or to be silenced by any weapon whatsoever. We have had many Tiananmen Square carnages but those have only completed the alienation of Kashmiris from New Delhi and strengthened their resolve to fight to the finish.

Democracy loses its content if the laws of an authoritarian state become part of governance and army and other security forces and agencies actually wield power and have control over people. Therefore government has to shatter its 'power infected knowledge' on the rock of truth. The moral high ground lies in accepting the uncomfortable truth as Pt. Nehru had promised which is desperately waiting to be realized in action.

Breaking the Dead Lock

In 2003 when the so-called peace process was set in motion, India succeeded in foregrounding the lesser contentions issues between the two countries and in putting Kashmir at the back burner in terms of priorities or by placing it as one of the lesser irritants of Indo-Pak relations in the composite dialogue. This way India underplayed the significance of Kashmir as a core issue. Jaswant Singh the then foreign Minister resorted to semantic jugglery by reshaping the centrality of Kashmir dispute by arguing that Kashmir is at the core of Indian nationhood in response to the argument that Kashmir is the core issue. Time has proved and continues to prove that even with Kashmir, Indian secularism has suffered considerable blows with the Hindutva wave on the rise.

Time has not only substantiated the status of Kashmir as a core issue, it has taken a body of its own for us to see. It has amply demonstrated that peace process is reversible without the settlement of lingering Kashmir dispute. If there has been any doubt on this, the less than snail pace of the dialogue and the absence of any forward movement has brought the two countries at loggerheads in Afghanistan. Those who had opined that peace process is irreversible had to eat a humble pie as they have been proved thunderingly wrong because even though there has been visible forward movement in the relations between the two because of some steps they have taken to improve relations yet those have not changed the nature

of Indo-Pak relations. Whether they acknowledge it or not, the recent escalation of forces and tension in Afghanistan and India's blaming Pak agencies for the attack on Indian Embassy as well as the stage managed skirmishes on LOC by vested interest in both the countries amply fortifies my perspective on the situation.

Take for example the recent security level talks which were slashed from two days to a one day meet, giving them limited time to set the tone for a fresh round of bilateral talks and the reason is none other than violent events in Afghanistan.

Viewed this way, one is forced to apprehend, that all that is going on in the name of these elaborate rounds of talks may end up achieving little beyond some CBMS between the two countries which will never change the age-old, ossified, petrified frozen relations between the two. The feeling is more pronounced in Kashmir where people already feel it too difficult to shrug off the hopelessness of the past 60 years to repose their full faith in the ongoing resolution efforts or are there any? One can hardly blame them for this approach. In the valley, the Kashmir conflict is not only the daily dose of unrelenting violence but also an everyday tussle between the ponderous weight of history and the uncertain hope of the peace process. We may have the restoration of some semblance of travel between the divided families of Kashmir through the five slit points (entry) but that is all. Let alone the resolution of the broad contours of dispute, the talks have made little redeeming difference to the ground situation in Kashmir. The reality of living with seven hundred thousand troops and some armed militants and the attendant Human right violations remain the same. Death toll continues to mount, although Iraq may have obscured it from the world. Gory

fact of today's Kashmir is not only its 30000 to 40000 widows and orphans, rape victims and thousands of devastated homes but also thousands of disappeared persons, almost all of them killed in custody and passed off as militants. If the dialogue process fails to break the status quo in Kashmir, it will be a greater disaster than what we have witnessed so far. A glimpse of that public outcry was recently demonstrated by the people on the lanes, byelanes, streets and roads of the valley on the pretext of opposing land transfer to (Shrine Board) that was actually the collective expression of anger on the stalemate in Kashmir.

Now whereas Pakistan has shown lot of flexibility on Kashmir in the recent years by almost rolling back her claim on Kashmir, by acknowledging Kashmiris' right to choose their political future, India has not reciprocated the same. In spite of re-cognizing and re-acknowledging the dispute in principle tacitly by including Kashmir issue in the agenda of composite dialogue, it has not taken corresponding practical steps to make a forward movement in the bilateral dialogue. The two countries, as a result, have not yet entered into serious path breaking discussions on the agenda set in the composite dialogue. There has been sluggish progress even on lesser irritants like Sir Creek and travel and fee trade, opening of communication channels etc. Many promises made during several rounds of talks have not been translated into action because if they hasten the pace on these issues, the next thing would be Kashmir resolution which India is trying to avoid.

Any attempt at dialogue on Kashmir results in a cacophony of jarring discordant irreconcilable voices and positions like a clash on monotheism between East and West.

The present world order is under strain and its definitions, trends and attitudes will soon evaporate into thin air. The international laws governing right to self-determination cannot be held hostage for long. The alternative world vision based on justice and fair play is fast gaining ground in the world.

Indian has to demonstrate to the world her claimed moral high ground/in consonance with the great tradition of Indian civilization by responding positively to the painful cry of Kashmiris for a right to shape their own destiny.

1. The most sensible way of breaking the deadlock would be to acknowledge Kashmir issue as an issue that pertains to the majority of thirteen million people's craving to be the masters of their own destiny with all its implications and possibilities.
2. The second step as a practical demonstration of the first step should be to demilitarize the Saichin by both the countries.
3. Demilitarization of LOC by both demilitarization of the Kashmir valley and the decommissioning of weapons by militant organisations and the simultaneous release of all the political prisoners.
4. A kind of Constituent Assembly should be formed comprising members from both sides of LOC, representative of all the regions of the State. The body could be elected through free and fair election for the purpose of establishing a constituent Assembly that could draft a new constitution and determine the limits of power to be exercised by Delhi and Islamabad in Kashmir in terms of foreign relations and management of defence.

Role of the University in the Social-Reconstruction

Perhaps never since the Second World War has peace-making become such an unmitigated emergency in the world. Today the global peace initiatives are more urgent than the laidback disarmament efforts of cold war era or the human rights-centric approach after the disintegration of USSR. This is because the factors unleashed by 09-11-2001 attack, hold a far greater potential for world-wide destabilization than any time in the post World War II.

Even though still on fringes, certain aspects of this dangerous scenario are already playing out in a livewire action across the world. This calls for an urgent and concerted global action to give the world back its sense of security and sanity. What universities can do to aid this elaborate effort is a subject that needs elucidation as also a redefinition. For peace keeping is a process which calls for a concerted institutional pursuit over and above the academies and the campus confines.

But before the role of the University or Universities is chalked out, it is pertinent to analyse the very concept of peace. Does this mean pursuing peace linearly in the literal sense of the term or does it mean understanding and resolving the causes of conflict and thereby insecurity and destabilization? I think the present geo-political approach

towards world peace is woefully shorn of this broader humane perspective. That it is refusing to see the mutuality and inextricability of pursuing peace and resolving the causes of conflict simultaneously.

September 2001 11 attack on US may have been the terrorist strike of unprecedented nature in its scale. What has followed in the nature of so-called peace wars cannot even be dubbed clean retaliatory actions. That is, for the sins of some misguided individuals or organizations it is the nations and their population who have suffered and are suffers. More than one billion strong community and their religion is being targeted and maligned, thereby bringing the world eerily close to a civilizational face-off, a prospect which until as recently as pre 9-11-2001 was regarded as a junk prophecy. In short, the present geopolitical paradigm has reduced the pursuit of peace into a linear, literal and politicized effort; and of course, into an absolute black and white tussel overlooking the multi-shades of grey in between. This is why after about one and a half-years of the global campaign against terror, the world is not any safer but is on the verge of further destabilization. If it was Afghanistan last year which had to be devastated for the sake of 'global security', a euphemism for US security, it is going to be Iraq this year and who knows how many more countries in the subsequent years. Or for the urgency of the 'American security' all the remaining countries could be dealt with over the course of only one year as Donald Rumsfeld's boast about the US might, would have us believe; "all these evil regimes could even be simultaneously taken on and finished within a matter of month". And as the new cannily manufactured political paradigm has demonstrated, it offers the US great convenience and scope for inventing new en-

emies which it could even strike unilaterally to realize its skewed vision of peace. What I want to say is that the present drive for peace comes across more as something like the global domination project of the new lone superpower than a genuine pursuit of world peace and security. That is why while there is a gameplan to strike countries for their supposed potential and intention to create trouble in future, nothing is being done to address the world's real and long-lingering trouble-spots like Palestine-Chechanya and Kashmir. On the contrary these conflicts despite being grounded in a complex political and historical context have suddenly acquired a terrorist label. This has overnight made the world impervious to the urgent need to consider these problems on their respective merits and in the context of their historicities. What a greater paradox while we invent new conflicts at our convenience and then move to address these in right earnest, the world's real problem spots are nobody's business.

So I am persuaded to think that before Kashmir University or for that matter any other University walks the path of peace-making, it should be wary of being psyched into furthering the dubious agenda of a superpower. For Kashmiris, therefore, the vision of peace cannot be an uncritical acceptance of the US formulation and its terror obsession but a comprehensive redressal of their problem. Yes, they desperately want to break free of the daily murder and mayhem and live peacefully but this peace cannot be reverting to the very factors that animate the present uncertainty and unease.

So it is the resolution of conflict for just peace rather than the pursuit of peace for the sake of dominant forces which should be our approach towards peacemaking.

Kashmir University could act as a potent force behind this endeavour by channelising its intellectual resources towards preparing a conducive atmosphere for this end. I think there is a dire need and urgency for Kashmir University to play this role for a single pre-eminent reason. That is, the University with all its institutional force behind it could prove instrumental in involving the intelligentsia in facilitating a resolution process. And I hope it is done at the earliest, as the lack of the proportionate participation of the state's intelligentsia has been one of the major undoings of the peace making efforts. But such a scale of institutional involvement from Kashmir University could be in for many a hitch. For one, beyond its routine academic sphere, University has to be active also on an extra-academic plane and to top it all, there is a real inbuilt risk of politicization of its endeavour, no matter, however, good-intentional. And such an imminent danger drastically circumscribes the sphere of its involvement in preparing a climate for peace.

As it stands today, Kashmir University has been thoroughly emasculated, rendered impotent and useless and teachers have been reduced to academic labourers 'who should take back their wages and go'. They have been shorn of their right to give either opinions or to generate new ideas and spread these through their interaction with the media. It is highly deplorable if Kashmir University's intellectual capacity as a think tank is not utilized in facilitating a way out of the prevailing mess.

Having said that since the conflict is still unresolved, and is raging as violently as before, the question of providing leadership in post conflict reconstruction does not arise at present but if the present exercise is meant to be a preparation for future post conflict period it is worth-

while to engage in a brain storming session so that some creative ideas crystalise for future action.

Kashmir University's role in the post-conflict reconstruction process has a comparatively far greater scope and chance of success, for the reconstruction process is so much more a practical and less a political effort than the resolution of a dispute which is through and through politically loaded for the so-called purely academic institution like Kashmir University. This it can do by stirring the otherwise dispute-stranded collective energies and channelizing these for the nation-building. Kashmir University has a great capacity for social and intellectual churning by which it could enable our society to adapt to change and progress, thus moving beyond a past marred by rampant violence and decline in educational standards. KU could give us our new generation of creative, progressive liberal, and forward-looking youth who would brighten our tomorrow.

In the future changed scenario of post-conflict, Kashmir University has a responsibility to do a radical rethinking on how to become relevant in the reconstruction process. It needs to move away from being a mere spectator of the happenings, events and sufferings of the masses to realizing that it is an actor and not a spectator. It has the potential of providing leadership in many fields of public life like carrying out research and identifying eco, social, psychological, environmental and other ills that have risen out of the economic situation. The Department of Economics can carry out research and survey of the eco problems and can devise programs, recommend solutions and plan of action in the areas worst affected by the decade-long violence.

The Department of Sociology can carry out door to door intensive survey of the exact number of orphans and widows and the disabled rendered so by violence as also categorize them according to their specific needs and could suggest to the government of the day how to improve their lot and reconstruct their lives. The Department of Psychology can carry out a survey of the various psychosomatic and other problems the entire population has been suffering from because of the violent conflict and suggest various solutions as also use its own expertise by training groups of students and send them on tours to various towns and villages to help the victims out.

Kashmir University could make a major new intervention in the affairs of the State, provided it gears itself up properly with an imbued sense of responsibility to society.

It needs to begin by recognising and celebrating through its various programs diversity and plurality not just in name and slogan but also in day-to-day practice in the post-conflict scenario. It could organise inter-regional and intercommunity interactions, get-togethers, and conferences for people to promote recognition, respect and understanding of each other's point of view and by so doing cleanse the hearts and minds of so much hatred and venom communities have harboured against each other over the years during the-conflict period, University could thus revitalize the unique composite culture which has been our hallmark but has been disrupted during the conflict by forces over which we had no control. University could engage in a persistent effort to nurture and revive the tolerant and pluralist culture and guard against parochial myopic and short-sighted. It can shatter the blinkers of our youth and help in developing their

total perspective which dissolves all boundaries-communal, racial, linguistic religious, geographical, regional and all the rest of it who can then.

University could give us our new generation of creative, progressive, liberal, forwarding-looking youth who could brighten our tomorrow.

We have passed through an uncertain past and are passing through a polluted and violent present and crave for virgin peaceful tomorrow. University has the potential to pave the way for such a future.

So far as gender-sensitivity is concerned, it is almost non-existent. It is the same old patriarchal culture which informs the behavior of men toward women in Kashmir University. Women are mostly understood as child-bearers and child-rearers who have no time for serious academic work according to male colleagues. Women's movements from outside the state have not touched them, if anything they refer to women who take interest in women's issues pejoratively as feminists. Some of them are not even conscious of their subconscious bias against women.

Women too have failed to organize themselves into group to assert their rights. However with new generation coming up, the ground is fertile for such an endeavour and university can play an effective role in gender sensitization of the society and in changing the decadent mindset of people vis-à-vis women.

In the areas I have chalked out earlier, Athwaas can work in collaboration with the university in research projects of economic, social and psychological relevance. University can become a nodal point for vibrant co-operation in these areas.

Some Reflections on the Kashmir Question

Policing the conflict presented in a seminar on Violence at various levels organised by Oxfam in Patna-Bihar April 2003

*Jab rang pa ba gil hoon, havaein bhi qaid hoon
Kya us phiza mein parcham-e-zakhm-e jigar
khule*

*"I am too old for an inner wildness-Ghalib
When the violence of the world is all around
me"*

*"Held behind lips, lament burdens the heart
The drop, held to itself fails the river, and is
sucked into dust."*

(-Ghalib)

I

The end of the previous world power balance has contributed to the destabilization of entire countries and the eruption of new conflicts. In such a fragmented and volatile world, political violence has broken out in many parts of the world. During conflicts whether international wars, civil wars or low-intensity insurgencies, the human rights of non-combatants are invariably at risk. However Kashmir conflict is as old as independent India.

Theoretically policing conflict does follow certain rules which are internationally agreed upon whatever be

the reason of the conflict. These are:

1. The fight is to be between either two armies of conflicting countries or the combatants and the State forces. No rules allow retaliatory or revenge killings of non-combatant civilians.
2. Killing of combatants is justified in actual encounters. Fake encounters and custodial and extra-judicial killings are totally illegal.
3. Use of human shields is immoral according to these rules.
4. There is no room for reprisal killings.
5. In policing conflict effort should be made to minimize its impact on general masses.
6. Detentions are not justified without speedy trials.
7. The State forces have no right to arrest the relatives of the combatant as a substitute for him. In short, conflict's impact has to be kept minimum for the general masses.

But in reality all these rules have been flouted. I will try to show this in relation to the Kashmir conflict. I will take up the discussion of the redefinition of peace by the US toward the end. But before I proceed to describe the stark reality of policing the conflict, let me give you a brief resume of the historicity of the Kashmir conflict.

The Kashmir conflict is perhaps the most protracted, intricate and the oldest on the UN agenda. It arose along with the independence of India from British rule and its partition into two nations. Despite staggering historiographical advances made by many historians giving a plethora of different interpretations and perspectives of the genesis of the conflict, the essential, irreducible, historical fact remains sacrosanct. Let me give a brief resume of the same.

- a. Lord Mountbatten accepted the instrument of accession of Jammu and Kashmir on the condition that it must be ratified by the people of Kashmir
- b. UN resolution of August 13, 1948 upheld the sovereign fundamental right of Kashmiris to be the ultimate arbiters of the political future of their state after receiving a complaint from Pandit Nehru when India and Pakistan clashed in Kashmir in 1947 to grab the control over its territory. There were three sections to the resolution:
 1. Call for a ceasefire between India and Pakistan
 2. Call for the withdrawal of Pakistani troops to be followed by withdrawal of troops by India
 3. That the future of Kashmir would be decided in accordance "with the will of the people."

Except for the first part there has been no progress regarding the other two provisions despite a series of resolutions passed by the UN thereafter. Being the core issue of contention between India and Pakistan for the past 60 years, it has influenced their National agendas and furnished the steam of the boats of their respective domestic politics. Hence, it has bedeviled their mutual relations with tension and conflict, thus resulting in three full-fledged wars, the recent Kargil war and a perpetual armed stand off. The resultant violence has led to untold sufferings of the people of Jammu and Kashmir in particular.

Following the two Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 they reached two major agreements regarding Kashmir.

- a. Tashkent Agreement in 1966 reaffirming their commitment to "settle their disputes through peaceful means"
- b. Shimla agreement in which both parties agreed that neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation.

However the situation started worsening after 1989, owing to a rapid escalation of violence in J & K, particularly in the valley. This was caused by many factors, the foremost being Kashmiri's total disillusionment with Indian democracy and secularism as practiced in Kashmir; institutional decay, corruption at all levels, lack of accountability, worsening socio-economic conditions, political vacuity, social injustice, lack of governance etc. In short, the growing dominance of the State seen in its control of civil society institutions, homogenisation of policies, programmes, solutions and culture, dismantling of social diversity, encouragement of consumerism of culture, products and policies and the growing power of bureaucracy and security apparatus instead of people's engagement in governance and community life or their creative participation in democratic processes. Above all, it was the use of brute force by the Government even against peaceful demonstration for civic rights like water and electricity. (13 persons were killed in July 1987 while participating in a peaceful protest demonstration against a hike in electricity tariffs.) and numerous other instances which compelled the youth of Kashmir to explore alternative ways of resistance.

It was against this backdrop that Kashmiri youth resorted to violence against the State as the ultimate mode of dialogue or communication with the Government because all other peaceful methods of demanding their rights were never heeded. The last nail in the coffin was the massive rigging of the 1987 elections leading to total alienation of Kashmiris from New Delhi. This was later exploited by Pakistan by supporting the basically indigenous armed resistance in Kashmir at many levels.

Unfortunately, instead of listening to the youth and

conceding their demands or bringing them to the table for the settlement of the dispute which a responsible, well meaning and democratic State should do with its people, the Government of India snatched away all the other fundamental rights of Kashmiris for supporting the demand for the right to self-determination or more appropriately placed all their rights under suspended animation by passing the "Armed Forces Special Powers Act" and other draconian laws such as TADA and now POTA, thus flouting all the rules of policing conflict. These acts bestowed unbridled powers on the armed forces to crush and destroy all opposition to State rule in J & K.

Ever since unprecedented violence has been unleashed on Kashmiris which has taken a toll of more than 60,000 civilians alone, disabled over 200,000 persons, orphaned 25,000 children and widowed more than 20,000 women and subjected over 3000 persons to enforced disappearances, devastated thousands of homes and destroyed property worth billions while the forces also looted jungles and orchards. Still, the dance of death and virulent cycles of violence go on unabated. The Government is glossing over these devastating operations, clearly against Geneva Conventions with pious moralisms of fighting back Pak-sponsored terrorism in Kashmir and thereby legitimizing and normalizing wholesale violence against the entire Kashmir society. The Government seriously believes in her own fictions about the state and avoids even the slightest chinks into the stark reality. Deception is most sinister when it is self-deception. What has been happening in Kashmir for over a decade now is intolerable to thought and odious to the soul. No eloquence could have been so withering to Kashmiri's belief in Indian secularism, democracy and humanism as the voice of terror and vio-

lence silently communing with them. Militancy too degenerated after 1990. Militants too did not observe the rules which govern such conflicts. The dream of freedom, of peace and prosperity, tolerance and justice and of being the shapers of their own destiny appeared to be replaced by vengeful atrocities against their own people. The agents of liberation soon partook of the qualities of State forces. And both the State and non-State perpetrators of violence seemed to be determined to achieve new refinements of horror and new depths of degradation. This could be demonstrated by a reference to the two gory incidents that shattered Kashmir last month. The massacre of 24 Kashmiri Pandits in Nadimarg and the chopping off the noses of 6 people at Panihad in Poonch (the victims included the wife and children of a local Muslim priest). While the first incident saw the Indian Government machinery pressed into action, the latter incident evoked no response. This points to the deep roots of Kashmir problem. The killers of Pandits were none other than state agents.

The State actors have crossed all limits in inflicting indescribable cruelties on innocent masses particularly women and children. The heinous atrocities include murder, rape, gang rape, arson, loot, custodial killings, crippling of youth both mentally and physically, shedding of pools of blood, chopping limbs of those arrested, mutilating bodies of those killed, burning humans and cattle in the fire set to entire villages, localities, towns and shopping complexes, torturing and humiliating non-combatants on the slightest pretext without any discrimination of age or sex, piling massacre upon massacre, third degree interrogation of those picked up at random, diurnal and nocturnal crackdowns in which men are dragged out

of the houses and women left alone at the force's beck and call, frequent parading of people before the hired street urchins called informers, daily search and destroy operations in any locality and house they choose for their wrath, beating up people ruthlessly every now and then, insulting and humiliating people on a daily basis-all this and much more has made the life of an average Kashmiri a horrendous nightmare.

The sanctity of religious places, hospitals, the delivery wards and labour rooms of pregnant women and institutions of learning have been defiled without any remorse. Even the University of Kashmir was surrounded many a time by the forces at midnight. Professors and students were dragged out at gunpoint like animals driven to a slaughter house and paraded for a whole day before hired agents. Parts of the University like the guest house and convocation hall have been converted into army camps vitiating the atmosphere on the campus. Most of the private hotels and cinema halls and even schools have been converted into bunkers and pickets in the most dictatorial manner. The yearlong siege of the holy shrine at Hazrat Bal in 1993 and desecration and demolition of the famous shrine of Alam-dar-e-Kashmir at Charar-I-Sharif (1995) and Khanquah of Shahi Hamdan (600 years old) at Tral Dist. Pulwama in 1998 has dealt the deepest blow to the collective psyche of Kashmiris. They are thought of as a category, a class, a race of animals and not human beings with certain rights. Instead of policing the conflict according to international laws, the armed forces have ordered a well planned disorder, created ordered darkness, an equality of misery and ensured justice in the sharing of that misery. The continuing violence at the hands of state and non-state actors has plunged the people into

the grip of debilitating cynicism, immobilizing depression, paralyzing mental torpor, and exhausting despair. They are caught in the quagmire from which there seems no return as the present stalemate of senseless violence continues. The unique counter-insurgency methods, employing surrendered militants as renegades have created havoc in the entire valley. The same game plan informs the policies of the Government in spite of intermittent so-called peace initiatives and cease fires designed to wade off the international criticism with no serious purpose of resolving the conflict for just peace. Massacres, enforced disappearances, custodial killings, torture, rape and daily killings and destroy operations have become mere tactics. Human rights are secondary to military advantage. Women have become the butt of reprisal killings and make up most of the refugees and displaced people. They are left to rear families by themselves. They are raped and sexually abused with impunity. They are raped because their bodies are seen as the legitimate spoils of war. Rape is an act of torture and clearly prohibited by the rules of war and by international human rights law. Yet no steps have been taken by the Government of India to prevent violence against women or to stop the gross violation of human rights. In fact members of the armed forces have kicked themselves loose of the earth or kicked the very earth to pieces. Rape is not an accident of war. The politics of rape is imbricate in women's bodies being a marker of community identity both as a metaphor and as a physical reality. Moreover the targeting of women in counter-insurgency is a calibrated strategy designed to destroy community which women all through conflict continue to hold together. Subjugation of women for the sake of male privilege or patriarchy is a feature of militarization. In short the army bunkers, soldiers, Kalashnikovs, detention cen-

ters, torture cells and mass graveyards of today have made Kashmir a paradise lost and rendered an entire population psychologically and physically sick.

II

Perhaps never since the second world war has peace making become such an unmitigated emergency in the world as today. The global peace initiatives are more urgent than the laid back disarmament efforts of cold war era or the human rights centric approach after the disintegration of the USSR. This is because the factors unleashed by 9/11 violent attack hold a far greater potential for world wide violence, destabilization and insecurity than any time in the post world war scenario. Certain aspects of this dangerous scenario are already playing out in a live wire action across the world. This calls for an urgent and concerted global action even at the NGO level, to give the world back its sense of security from violence.

Before I proceed further it is pertinent to analyse the very concept of peace. Does it mean pursuing peace linearly in the literal sense of the term or does it mean understanding and resolving the causes of conflict and thereby of insecurity and destabilization. I think the present geo-political approach towards world peace is woefully shorn of this broader human perspective. That is, it is refusing to see the mutuality and inextricability of pursuing peace and resolving the causes of conflict on the basis of justice. September 11, 2001 attack on US may have been the terrorist violent strike of an unprecedented nature in its nature and scale, what has followed in the nature of so called peace wars cannot even be dubbed as clean retaliatory actions. That is for the sins of some misguided individuals or organizations it is the nation and their population who have borne the scars of violence.

More than one billion strong community and their religion is being targeted and maligned thereby bringing the world eerily close to a civilizational face off. A prospect which until as recent as pre 11/9/2001 was regarded as a junk prophecy. In short, the present geo-political paradigm has reduced the pursuit of peace into a linear, literal and politicized effort and of course into an absolute black and white tussle overlooking the multi-shades of grey in between. This is why after about one and a half years of the global campaign against terror the world is not any safer but is on the verge of further destabilization and insecurity. If it was Afghanistan last year, which had to be devastated for the sake of global security – a euphemism for US security, it is Iraq at present and who knows how many more countries in the subsequent years. Or for the urgency of American security all the remaining countries could be dealt with over the course of only one year or as Donald Rumsfeld's boast about US might would have us believe, all these 'evil regimes' could even be simultaneously taken on and finished within a matter of a month. And as the new cannily manufactured political paradigm has demonstrated, it offers the US great convenience and scope for inventing new enemies which it could strike unilaterally to realize its' skewed 'vision of peace'. What I want to say is that the present drive for peace and end of violence comes across more as something like a global domination project of the new lone superpower than a genuine pursuit of world peace and security. That is why while there is a game plan to strike countries for their supposed potential and intention to create trouble in future; nothing is being done to address the world's real and long-lingering trouble spots like Palestine and Kashmir. On the contrary these conflicts despite being grounded in a complex political and historical context

have suddenly acquired a terrorist label. This has overnight made the world impervious to the urgent need to consider these problems on their respective merits and in the context of their historicities. What a bitter paradox while we invent new conflicts at our convenience and then move on to address these in right earnest, world's real problem spots are nobody's business. In our own context, India has been emboldened by this US definition of peace as it has always linked Kashmir to her national security and integrity or in other words, Kashmir has been held hostage to her misplaced notions of national security, integrity and prestige thereby justifying heavy militarization and nuclear proliferation. Needless to say that political issues cannot be resolved militarily. Before NGO's walk the path of peace-making or come to an understanding of conflict resolution they should be wary of being into furthering the dubious agenda of a superpower. There is a silver lining in the fact that splintered voices and NGOs all over the world have come together to call the US bluff and protest against her unjust and illegal unilateralism tooth and nail. They have already rejected US perspective and are engaged in working out an alternative vision of peace and the end of violence. For Kashmiris therefore the vision of peace cannot be an uncritical acceptance of the US formulation and its terror obsession but a comprehensive redressal of their problem based on justice. Yes they desperately want to break free of the daily violence, murder and mayhem and live peacefully but this peace is not merely absence of violence and reverting to the very factors that animate the present uncertainty and unease. So it is the resolution of conflict for just peace rather than pursuit of peace for in terms of silencing the dissent which should be our approach towards peace building. NGOs collectively could act as a potent force

behind this Endeavour by channelising their resources towards preparing a conducive atmosphere for this end. They could prove instrumental in involving the intelligentsia on the one hand and pressurize the Government of India on the other in facilitating a resolution process and I hope it is done at the earliest as the lack of the proportionate participation of the state's intelligentsia has been one of the major undoings of peace building efforts in the state and unjust, arrogant and ossified cliché ridden stand of the Government of India has so far thwarted the dawn of genuine and just peace in Kashmir.

The Role Of Women In Peace Movement

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The concept of peace has become problematic as it has been abused and misused over the years by colonisers and by those who have launched the imperialistic project in the world. It has also been used to silence people who are demanding political and civil rights and to their discourse.

Therefore, I cannot but start with a sense of trepidation being conscious of how the politics of peace process is used to camouflage the nefarious designs of those who dominate and subjugate others. It is important to know who is using the discourse of peace and for what purpose. American bombardment and aggressive intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq is a case in point. American invasion euphemistically called Operation. Liberation for Peace in Afghanistan and its aggression of Iraq to help Iraqis and the world to get rid of weapons of mass destruction and tyrant Saddam Hussein for peace, is before all of us to see. Since the "US intervention for peace" 150000 people have been killed, let alone the vast devastation of the entire country, its security, peace and prosperity.

Closer home, the peace slogan is used by the domi-

nant power to crush and silence the resistance to occupation and militarization, to the acrimonious implementation of draconian laws, to political manipulation and scuttling of the popular voice. It is used as a subterfuge to distract attention from the dirty acts being performed by occupation forces and from the main issue. And this necessitates a brief mention of the causes of escalation of violence and absence of peace in our part of the world.

Kashmir problem was born at the time of partition of India by British Viceroy in Aug 1947 on the basis of religion. At the time of partition there were four independent states that were given a right to join either of the two countries on the basis of the religion of the majority of people in each state. Kashmir was one such state. And according to the partition logic Kashmir should have naturally acceded to Pakistan for its religious and geographical affinity with her. But the king was a Hindu who wanted to keep Kashmir independent of both and made a standstill agreement with them but very soon when he fled Kashmir under the pressure of popular Muslim revolt against his tyrannical and despotic rule, India engineered an instrument of accession with him and installed Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah as Prime Minister with his conditional support to accession.

This led to an Indo-Pak clash in Kashmir for its territorial possession resulting in its partition. Pandit Nehru, the first prime minister of free India, took the matter to U.N. The Security Council resolutions of 1948 upheld the sovereignty of the people to decide their political future and Nehru committed himself to these in Parliament and in the historic Lal Chowk of Srinagar and declared that "there shall be no forced unions, no forced marriages, Kashmiris shall be allowed to go their way and we shall

go ours." But till date those resolutions have not been implemented. Instead India prostituted democracy in Kashmir, and eroded her own constitutional guarantees encapsulated in article 370 which guaranteed a special status to Kashmir in the so-called accession. When Sheikh Abdullah reminded Delhi of the conditionality of accession, he was arrested by a constable of police and put behind bars for 13 years. Govt of India destroyed civil liberties and repressed people in all possible ways and imposed one stooge govt. after another, extended central laws to Kashmir and manipulated the political will of people, the policies and programmes as also the demography of the state so much so that from 80% Muslim population in 1947 the subsequent census reports have been showing a steady decrease in numbers and according to the latest 2001 census report Muslims are shown only 67%. Besides, rampant corruption at all levels has been given a state patronage and ingrained at a very deep level so much so that.

People's patience came full circle in 1989 when Kashmiri youth took to guns as a vehicle of dialogue with New Delhi as all other peaceful protest demonstrations had failed to cut the ice. The masses renewed their struggle for right to self-determination. India, instead of listening to the grievances, responded to the peoples with a military might and in response to the demand for right to self-determination, all other fundamental rights and usable freedoms have been put under suspended animation. Draconian Laws like Armed Forces Special Power Act, Disturbed Area Act, Public Safety Act have been promulgated to give forces a free hand and total control over the life and death of people. Kashmir today has the distinction of having the highest military concentration in the world

(1:15) totalling to 665000 armed forces. These different forces comprise of army, BSF, CRPF - paramilitary forces and state police who commit gross violation of human rights, crimes against humanity in the entire Kashmir Valley ranging from fake encounter killings, to custodial killings and disappearances, from random arrests to burning of houses, localities, shopping complexes and not the least rape and molestation of women.

On the other hand, militants also committed human rights violations of innocent people in the name of being police-informers and have been throwing grenades at public and congested places which have resulted in the deaths of women and children besides men and physically disabling thousands.

Without trying to over simplify the issue and without trying to state half truths, one thing that stands out is that women have been the primary victims of this conflict. They have lost husbands and sons; homes and hearth and their security and dignity. In most cases this meant losing their bread earners. They have been raped by forces in order to inflict humiliation on their community. They have been drafted as comfort women or prostitutes for different wings of law-making and law-enforcing agencies, which is testified to by a recently unraveled sex scandal in which a large number of women have been regularly exploited under state patronage. Residential areas and fields have been burnt along with foodgrains and cattle and the means of caring for their children have been destroyed.

As some one has rightly said that as Helen of Troy women have been used to inflict humiliation on the conquered and like Cassandra their warnings about the consequences of war have been ignored.

It is this historical experience of suffering that has propelled even Kashmiri conservative women into the forefront of peace movement. Grass roots women have come out on streets and demonstrated against army and paramilitary brutalities as also the atrocities committed by militants. They demonstrate in favor of the right to self-determination and plead for the preservation of life and property. They have shown their disapproval of all kinds of violence and upheld the rights of people.

Feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick contends that the work women have been historically (biologically) assigned, birth labor and child rearing, have created an ethical norm of "preservative love which leads to maternal non-violence, not as something always realized (because mothers have been child abusers and warriors too) but as a truth in the making" (Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Non-Violence: toward a Politics of Peace*, Ballentine books 1989).

The complexities of these connections have lead to tensions within feminist movements themselves. There are many feminist voices which have always claimed that a commitment to non-violence and peace - making is logically inseparable from feminism (Pam Mc Allister, *Re-weaving the Web of Life: feminism and Non-Violence* (new Society publishers, 1982).)

Others, seeing feminism as an extension of civil libertarian thought, have pushed for equality of opportunity for women in national militaries. Some feminists have viewed women's involment in armies in liberation struggles differently than in occupying armies or armies for maintenance of status quo. (W Chapkis, ed, *Loaded Questions: Women in the Military* Transnational Institute 1981).) Perhaps one reason women seem to "take" to practices of non violent direct action more quickly than

men is that they are used to searching for alternative forms of power than violence - a power that has mostly been denied to them. Another factor is that they already know that courage comes in more varieties than the common male model of facing an adversary with the same kind of weapons. In our context women especially most of the educated women lack political consciousness and merely oppose violence without seeing it as an aftermath of political problem. They are made to see violence by the government propaganda machinery as an a priori growth that has not flowed from political repression, manipulation and undermining of democracy. They say 'we want peace and nothing else'. Then there are those who are in majority mostly at the grassroots level who have saner understanding and clearer vision of the situation but they cannot articulate the same and instead demonstrate on the streets and roads for the rights and against the violations. They seem to combine the two feminist positions that is the preservation of life and the fight for civil liberties and democratic rights for dignified life.

Peace is not merely the absence of conflict or war (negative peace, cold war) but also the presence of co-operation between the sexes, compassion and justice and genuine democracy (positive peace, hot peace). Peace as used by the dominant power in our context implicitly means the end of resistance to occupation, to militarization, draconian laws, political manipulation and an end to the demand for universal norms of peace and justice. It means, in effect, fortifying and stabilizing the status quo and giving people "peace education" to give up their struggle for rights.

Whereas the universal positive interpretation of peace, needless to say, is a state of being or situation where

people live in physical, mental and spiritual harmony and equilibrium, where rights are ensured and protected and duties performed; where people freely exercise their rights and choices without any fear; where there is a complete sense of security and people aren't forced into relationships of subservience. To be more specific, peace cannot be imposed from without with the military might. It has to come from within and that is possible only when genuine demands have been met, rights granted and justice ensured and administered and people left free to govern themselves and creatively participate in democratic processes.

The speeches which have been delivered on the occasion of rewarding Nobel peace prizes by Swedish Council to thirteen women recognize diverse paths to peace, as the prizes have been given in acknowledgement of their working for peace at various levels. The awardees set before us an array of great human spirits who come from a variety of backgrounds and represent a variety of peace-making, from campaigning against the irritants of peace to actually serving people at the grass root level or campaigning against war and violence and advocating peace, rights and justice at the intellectual level through their writings.

What did all these peace laureates have in common? They were all women of high ideals prepared to work and sacrifice to bring something better into being. They labored in the certainty that their objectives would eventually be realized. They all carried within that 'sacred flame' which Gunner Jahn perceived in Emily Greene Balch which inspired them to struggle against odds, to withstand disappointments, and defeats and to resolve never to give up. They shared a faith in humanity whether born of re-

ligious conviction or humanism. Most of them displayed remarkable courage. Not all faced the armed rifle as did Aung San Suu Kyi or had to hide from the soldiers as did Rigoberta Menchu Tum.

But it took courage to withstand the stings and arrows of militaristic press of imperial Germany or the wartime patriotic fervor in the US, just as it took courage to take the first step to break the circle of violence in Northern Ireland.

In our context there are few courageous spirits who can raise their voice against gross violation of human right injustices and decadent patriarchal structures, which suffocate women and are responsible for their sufferings. In such a context it needs extraordinary courage to speak in the presence of extremely repressive state and oppressive patriarchy. Here I would like to state how I negotiated the boundaries of gender, community and nationhood in the face of extreme fear to play a vital role in the movement for just peace in spite of threat to my life and lot of harassment from the state. I was conscious from my adolescent days about the less than human treatment women receive in our societies as also of the reality that the Kashmiris have yet to determine their political future for which I suffered inwardly. My fight for my human rights and status as a woman took precedence in the relatively calm atmosphere of early 1980s and I succeeded to a large extent in gaining my personal freedom in the matters of education and marriage. I received wounds while confronting the ossified patriarchal thinking and attitudes. But at least in our district I was able to liberate women from the dead weight of customs and conventionality which gave women only a passive role in life. After I finished my PG in English literature, a large number of girls

from my town were inspired to pursue higher studies because till that time very few girls made it to the college, most of them never crossed 10th class.

Being inspired by my father, I have cherished the passion for freedom from India from an early age. For this, I supported wholeheartedly the peaceful political movement for freedom which could bring about genuine peace in not only Kashmir but in the whole of south Asia. Though understanding why our youth resorted to the armed resistance, as a last resort of a suppressed nation, I am very uncomfortable with it as I hate violence in all forms and manifestations. Hence I have been advocating the peaceful resolution of Kashmir issue ever since the eruption of militancy in 1990 through my writings, my presentations in seminars, conferences, workshops and public discussions. I have been strongly denouncing the use of brute force by Indian State in Kashmir and the crimes committed by armed forces. I have also condemned and continue to condemn human rights violations by militants which nobody has the courage to do even today. In October 1995 after years of curfews and crackdowns when Hurriyat Conference organized a seminar in Ahdoo's Hotel Srinagar to break the silence of civil society for the first time in the presence of gun totting forces and militants, I condemned strongly not only forces' but equally forcefully militants' atrocities on people which was a great feat of courage in the midst of repression from both sides. No one dares to speak publicly against these atrocities and when I left the seminar hall, many people advised me to take security guard with me as they perceived threat to my life. In 1996, I represented human rights situation in Kashmir in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva which became a memorable intervention in the commis-

sion and garnered support for the international pressure on India to stop gross human rights violations like killings, torture, custodial killings and disappearances, rapes and molestation of women and burning of homes and hearth in the valley. It made an impact internationally and brought some qualitative change in the situation on the ground. But when in the university I was on the verge of being terminated and the then state home minister Mushtaq Lone pelted the process I returned, I was hounded like a criminal and my passport was impounded and my services almost terminated. In this visit I also met many Pakistanis and impressed upon them to hold Kashmiris' aspirations over and above their own claim on Kashmir. In recent years we have seen Pakistan showing flexibility and openly pronouncing that Kashmiris' aspirations are paramount but deplorably India continues to be adamant. In 1999, I was invited by ambassador Swanee Hunt of Women And Public Policy Programme of Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, to be the founding member of Women Waging Peace – a collaborative multi-year project of Kennedy School of Govt. and Hunt Alternatives to build peace especially in the conflict zones of the world. It has members from almost all conflict zones and the members produced what is known as best strategies in two week long conference cum workshop in Harvard University. My written strategy was adjudged as the best in the said workshop. I write regularly for the project about my activities for peace building. In 2002 I started a coaching centre for Kashmir and Indian Administrative Service exams (KAS And IAS), an initiative first of its kind in Kashmir to streamline the potential of our youth and guide them how to prepare for the exams as Kashmiris hardly made it to IAS. Most of the candidates who enrolled were girls and many of them opted

for KAS and IAS. And the subsequent batches have been doing better. In 2005 I represented Kashmiri women in the UN commission on women and built alliances with many organisations and women participants for peace building. In 2006 I started Kashmir Centre for Peace, Social and Development Studies to hold periodic roundtable discussions on important pol, and social, and development issues while inviting a cross section of people mostly intellectuals to deliberate upon and to carry out research on the related subjects. Besides other topics, last year the Centre held a discussion on President Musharraf's four point formula for the resolution of Kashmir issue, emphasizing on its socio economic and peace dividends. This brought about greater awareness in many people about its importance for peace as it cleared many doubts and suspicions in there minds about the same. I am part of the efforts made to resolve Kashmir issue peacefully and participate in peace conferences annually in Washington organized by Association of Humanitarian Lawyers and Kashmir American Council. I am also part of the track two deliberations on Kashmir resolution organized by PUGWASH Conference on Science and World Affairs (Italy bared in and Washington). I also work with IKV Paxchristi, Utrecht, Netherlands. Recently I participated in its seminar on gender and militarization. I was part of a twelve 12 member visiting team from Indo-Pak and Kashmir to Northern Ireland in November 2007 sponsored by British high Commission in Delhi, to familiarize us with Irish peace process. On my return, I shared the lessons learned in two workshops on peace building in Kashmir sponsored by WISCOMP and CDR, Delhi based organizations. I have participated in many peace building South Asian workshops organized by SAFHR where I brought greater awareness about human rights violations in Kashmir

particularly that of women and children. In November from 16 to 18, 2007 I participated in a historic intra Kashmiri women's conference in which I was able to make women make a shift from the socialite clichés of "I want peace, I have nothing to do political issue" to actually making them commit themselves to the efforts of peaceful resolution of political problem which alone could guarantee just and lasting peace in the region. Because the bedrock of reconciliation and resolution process has to be the recognition and acceptance of political rights and aspirations as it was in Northern Ireland. On Kashmir sadly, there are powers that are still in denial mode. If it is not accepted today history will never forgive us. For South Asia has huge backlog of unfinished business – millions of hungry stomachs to feed, social justice to deliver to the dispossessed and the marginalized. Costly militarism and colonial expeditions simply disastrous.

As already mentioned women's role or even men's for that matter is extremely limited though our women have been coming out collectively on the streets and roads to demonstrate against State repression and forces' atrocities, killings, arrests, crackdowns, rapes and molestations since 1989 and they have also acted as bread earners for their families while going against cultural taboos, and nurturing life in the midst of death and disruption yet many individuals have not come on the forefront. Zamarud Anjum Habib is one of the grass roots another courageous lady who comes from grass roots dared to come in politics and condemned Indian brutalities. Zamarud founded Women Welfare Association in Anantnag Kashmir in 1988 in response to a dowry death. Having a degree in law and education, she was teaching in local Hanfia College when she woke up to the plight of

women in her area. Through her organization she worked against dowry demands and sexual exploitation of young girls in the name of jobs. She was able to attract 250 teachers as its members from both Muslims and Pandits. The Organization was effective for some time but toward the end of 1989 when armed resistance erupted in Kashmir valley, priorities changed and unforeseen events took us by storm which shifted the focus from societal to political repression. When govt. of India responded to armed resistance with military might armed with draconian laws to crush the popular movement, Zamarud shot into politics and launched Khawateen-I-Markaz in 1990 to fight for the right to self-determination.

While demonstrating against human rights violations she was arrested many times in 1990s. She also condemned the atrocities committed by government sponsored counter insurgency group called ikhwan in her hometown which had created havoc there and exploited young girls. She was in the midst of documenting war widows and had prepared a list of hundred orphans for computer education when she was arrested on alleged false charges in Feb 2003. She was recently released in the month of December 2007 after putting in 5 years of torturous imprisonment in Tihar Jail, Delhi. What really stands out in Zamarud is her courage in the face of challenges and military might and her perseverance to fight for a just cause.

Parveena Ahanger is one of many unfortunate mothers whose son was a victim of custodial disappearance. Her son Javaid was picked up by the National Security Guards (NSG) in Batamallo Srinagar Kashmir on August 1990, and taken to one of the interrogation centers which had reared their ugly heads all over the Valley. Javaid was

the school going adolescent when NSG suspected him of being affiliated with a militant organization and brusquely picked him up without a substantial rationale for questioning. Parveena symbolizes the plight of ordinary Kashmiris who do not have access to echelons of power and therefore live anonymously in the fortresses of ruthless militarism until they are buried in the catacombs of history.

A courageous and forthright, she chose to shed the inhibition imposed by her cultural mores in order to verbalize the agony of a wounded mother. Instead of lamenting voicelessly behind the closed portals of her cultural and societal mores, Parveena formed an organization called Association of bereaved mothers whose sons had been victims of custodial disappearances or custodial deaths.

Parveena and other mothers like her seek to know the fate of their children who disappeared in the abyss of political and military oppression before life had a chance to beckon them. The unknown fate of their children is a constant instrument of torture for them. The lack of closure in the lives of such parents makes their daily life very painful. There are many families of disappeared persons who are on the verge of starvation. There are half widows who are in a dilemma whether to remarry or not. The unwavering fortitude of women like Parveena in their fight for justice in a context of the culture of impunity symbolizes the self assertion and self-definition intervention of Kashmiri women in patriarchal national history by speaking (from their locations) about the current political realities in the context of theological, patriarchal political imperialism.

Culture of Impunity (April 18-2009)

The present Socio-political culture of Kashmir is the creation of the culture of impunity nourished and strengthened by the State. Impunity literally means 'exemption from punishment or loss' in the international law of human rights. It refers to the failure to bring perpetrators of human rights violations to justice and as such it-self constitutes a denial of the victims' right to justice and redress. It has become pervasive in places and countries that lack a tradition of the rule of law or suffer from corruption or that have entrenched system of patronage or where the judiciary is weak or 'security forces' are protected by special jurisdiction or immunities. It is clearly operational in our part of the world where the term impunity covers a wide spectrum of human rights violations at political, economic, social and cultural levels as there is no accountability for violations committed by the state. Human rights violations are not confined to massacres, genocides, tortures, custodial killings but include every aspect of human life in society and impunity is provided to all such violations. This meaning of impunity is warranted by the broadened definition given in the amended set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights Action to Combat Impunity submitted to UN Commission of Human Rights on 8th Feb.

2005:

"the impossibility, de jure or de facto of bringing the perpetrators of violation to account - whether in criminal, civil, administrative or disciplinary proceedings, since they are not subject to any enquiry that might lead to their being accused, arrested, tried and found guilty and sentenced to appropriate penalties and to making reparations to their victims."

Our political, economic, social and cultural rights are also routinely violated with impunity. In fact, the culture of impunity has been entrenched in the entire system. It is not to be confused with the gripping culture of corruption that afflicts it in which gross human rights abuses are committed also routinely without legal accountability of the abusers and active complicity of officials. Kashmir's modern history has been disfigured by unfathomable acts of official cruelty and inhumanity. Few have been held to account for criminal acts of depravity that can be soberly described as monstrous. (Examples are countless.) My purpose here is not to give statistical data of gross violations in which impunity is provided by the state but to show how this culture has impacted the civil society. In fact, the culture of impunity has been institutionalized and legitimized both at the 'security' level through special legislations, extra constitutional powers given to military, and other security agencies and through imported bureaucracy and at the civil level by breeding corruption at all levels in order to dehumanize and desensitize people about their political disempowerment and their human dignity.

The absence of accountability and transparency is justified by invoking 'national integrity' and 'security

Concerns'. The alarming thing is that this culture of impunity nourished by the State has had disastrous consequences for our society. It has torn to pieces the moral fibre which holds a society together. It has percolated down in the civil society in a way that the otherwise concerned citizens too have become insensitive and indifferent not only to all kinds of violations of rights but to the misdeeds and moral depravity of the populace (because of the abysmal official apathy to all cries for justice). The death of accountability and sense of responsibility in the society has opened a Pandora's Box of nefarious activities and profligacies.

What is alarming is that the civil society, on the whole, has become apathetic to all deviations from approved and agreed upon norms of public and personal morality so much so that people in general have started kicking loose of the earth or kicking the very moral base of the earth to pieces. Civil society has become indifferent and insensitive to what is happening around while all approved codes of conduct and moral values derived from Islam are flouted with disdain and impunity. Thus the culture of impunity has seeped imperceptibly in the arteries and veins of our society, because there is no social deterrence in place which would be provided by certain social institutions. These institutions have also been benumbed by the political situation in the state. Some groups in the last two decades started 'reformation movement' with violent means which proved counterproductive by reducing Islam to mere legalism and that too to a dress code for girls ignoring the vital issues which cry for attention. Because the patriarchal mindset cannot think beyond women's repression as a cure for all social ills. This has only added fuel to the fire. Rate of divorces has alarmingly gone high

and thousands of marriageable jobless girls (40 thousand in Srinagar district alone) could not get life partners. Women have become saleable commodities and school and college youth are indulging in lurid activities and consumption of drugs which are clandestinely supplied by mysterious persons. Homes are fast becoming breeding grounds of vice and profligacy and those who offer ritualistic prayers are more corrupt. Corruption at all levels - economic, intellectual, moral, spiritual and social is pervasive. What is clear to the naked eye is the pollution of the environment and heaps of dirt piled everywhere. It is strange that people have even forgotten their civic values and become immune to pollution around them. What is deplorable is that civil society is a mute spectator to all this. The so-called "modern educated intellectuals" have become too individualistic swamped by postmodern Euro-American libertarian culture where every member of society is supposed to be a world unto himself or herself and society is supposed to have no right to intervene in matters of "personal morality" as it is relative for them. This culture has afflicted Asia in a big way through TV and Internet and Kashmiris, who pride themselves on being better imitators especially the so-called elite class, could not lag behind. If we cast an impartial glance at Euro-American world, we could see what a havoc has been wrought by libertarian attitude, absolute licentiousness and promiscuity; lack of accountability and punishability for immoral acts of individuals in the society.

Their homes are broken, schools are full of teenage pregnancies, rape and prostitution is pervasive and nobody can question them or try to give them lessons in moral values to dissuade them from body worship as that would

be considered intellectual backwardness and transgression into their private domain and therefore, to be resented. It is the existing family structure and moral values (now fast disappearing) in Kashmir that sustained us in the extraordinary turbulent times. Any other society would have buckled under pressure long ago.

No wonder, then, that many civil society leaders and NGOs in Europe and US are working for family values and their slogan is "back to basics" because family is the primary stronghold of the society whose health affects the entire society. But once the family is broken, body worship is taken to extremes, and the genie of animal instincts is out of the bottle, it is extremely difficult to put it back in the confinement. That is why their basic structure of society is in shambles. For us there is still hope of redemption from this growing menace strengthened by the cover of impunity which has been attacked far and wide by an alternative discourse but no concrete steps have been taken to end the culture of impunity in our society. Islam has given an elaborate body of norms on how to conduct ourselves in this world which cut across the bogey separate of public and private domains and deviations from norms are made punishable. Besides, these norms have not been superseded by any other religion. In fact it was in recognition of this fact that Swami Vivekananda said that Vedantic brain is nothing unless wedded to Islam body. Majority of our people tried to live their lives by these norms but because of the entrenched culture of impunity in the state and occupation of the civilian space by the army and other 'security agencies' particularly in the past twenty years, and the influence of the media explosion, many people have shuffled off 'the moral coil' and started living a libertarian life which is

creeping slowly but steadily in our homes as people do not fear any sort of punishment or excommunication or displeasure or wrath from the society. In fact corruption at every level has become 'respectable' as it 'elevates' the corrupt materially. The very fact that this perverted elevation has social sanction and has become a status symbol is odious of the soul. This has been strengthened by the Philistinian outlook on life derived from modern culture in which people are in a rat race for material goods and the ethical values are thrown to the winds. If we do not sensitize our people and enforce norms of clean living and thinking in the society today, and make the lapses, deviations and corrupt practices abominable and punishable, we are doomed to lose our identity for ever.

The rectification must begin from home and school. The corrupt practices and immoral behavior of parents and teachers do not provide models for our youth. Therefore the first step is to reform homes and schools. Religious leaders like imams could play an important role in this rectification not by acting as police men or by giving terrifying details of hell but by gentle persuasion and by capturing visions of a healthy, clean and harmonious society for their audiences. We have to revive the old tradition of mohalla, village, tehsil and district committees where they have disappeared and sensitize them where they exist to this alarming situation and these committees must be constituted of persons of integrity and great moral values who could act as watch dogs at the grass root level. These committees will also shoulder the responsibility of providing social security to poor and the needy particularly to the widows and orphans the current situation has thrown up, out of the Zaka't and other contributions collected from the mohallas villages

tehsils and districts. There has to be a networking of committees through out the state for this purpose. These committees will also undertake the task of ensuring clean environment. Faith and cleanliness are inextricable from each other. Kashmiris have, in spite of their many failings, time and again proved to be the best managers of social affairs when a chance is given to them (which is very rare. Every initiative has been wrested away from them.) I am sure they will take up this challenge with conviction and passion and put the society back on the moral rails from which it has deviated, and ensure the cleanliness of their environment.

*Zara num ho tou yeh metti bahut
zarkhaiz hai saki.*

This Rage has a Reason

KASHMIR - THE WAY OUT

Bare statements won't do. The problem demands solution on the ground, comments Hameedah Nayeem

Even as the bloodbath and the massive protests continued unabated in the battered valley, Indian politicians, the mandarins of bureaucracy, the spin doctors of establishment and the embedded media men intensified their offensive of dubbing the current crisis as Pak-sponsored. Nothing could be farther from truth. The mowing down of one growing teenage boy after another, after people's protests against Machhil fake encounter in which three persons after having been lured by jobs were killed in cold blood by the army near LoC, created the current crisis. Tufail Ahmad Mattoo's (17) brain fell on the ground after being hit by a tear gas shell thrown at the protesting youth while returning home from his tuition classes on 11th June. The gruesome picture of his disfigurement in the news papers and cable channels rended the hearts of mothers, sisters and the youth who protested massively the next day in which another youth, Rafiq Ahmad Bangroo (24) was beaten to death by CRPF in downtown Srinagar. This further intensified the public rage and people clashed with CRPF personnel while carrying out the funeral procession of Rafiq in which resulted in the killing of Javaid Ahmad Malla (22) was brutally killed on 20th June. These barbarian killings out-

raged the entire populace of Kashmir and they came out on the streets furiously protesting against this carnage and continued to demand action against the killers in their protest demonstrations and the repealing of draconian laws by virtue of which the forces have been given the license to kill, arrest and destroy homes on mere suspicion. It is in knee jerk reaction or calibrated one (who knows which) that CRPF in Sopore and JK police in Islamabad allegedly killed in cold blood Shakeel Ahmad Ganai (17), Firdous Ahmad Kakroo (16), Bilal Ahmad Wani (21) on 27th June and Tauqir Ahmad (9) and Tajamul Bashir (17) on 28th in Sopore and Ishtiyaz Ahmad Khandey (15), Imtiyaz Ahmad Itoo (17) and Shujat ul Islam (16) in Islamabad in south Kashmir on 29th June. When the situation was slightly improving, Muzzafer was chased to death in Batamallo on 5th July when a minister paid a visit to the area under the instructions from Delhi and Fayaz Ahmad and Fancy Jan were killed in batamallo with 'flying bullets' when the protesters were protesting the brutal killing of Muzaffer Ahmad. The next day, Abrar Ahmad, 17, the cute tender boy in Maisuma was killed in cold blood on 6th July. This is how the so-called security agencies resorted to carnage and created the current turmoil in the state yet the Indian media had the gall to say that violence was imported. How could the Lilliputian intervention of considerably weakened militant organizations create such a situation which only the deeply hurt feelings could bring about? Had it been so, they could have created this sort of situation before. Nothing is more painful, insulting and demeaning to our mothers and Kashmiris in general than to be told that their grief and outrage at the killing of their blooming young boys and their quest for political empowerment is actually their willingness to be used by "others on pay-

ment " New Delhi and its cohorts have bruised our collective psyche beyond repair time and again and it is these deep wounds and scars that speak on the streets of Kashmir. Only refer back to last year's Shopian atrocity which left deepest scar on our psyche and the lava has been smoldering inside for the past one year. How our collective soul was strangled by the distortion of facts about that case, how even the CBI was used to cover up the soul-stirring atrocity and thereby complete denial of justice. People knew that they will never get justice as everything is condoned here in the name of flawed notion of jingoistic nationalism and would have called off the strike if their grief and suffering would have been acknowledged and their feelings assuaged by appropriate steps which people were demanding for. But unfortunately New Delhi continues to be in the denial mode of Kashmiris' pain and sufferings and their rights' movement and dubs every cry for justice as law and order problem- the cliché which has outlived its use by being overused and by implicating Pak hand which is a convenient ploy to muzzle the public voice of dissent. Stone throwing falls within the paradigm of resistance and not the law and order domain. It symbolizes Kashmiri youth's abhorrence for Indian domination in the state symbolized by the unprecedented presence of army and other forces and her rule which has manifested itself in manipulation of Kashmiris as dumb driven cattle and concentration of all the political and security related powers in Delhi while being forcibly held against their will. The present agitation is not therefore against the CM of the state government who has already been divested of all power and authority by a mere babu from Delhi who issues a laundry list of do's and don'ts to him like a headmaster of yore, and therefore the change of "poster boy of democ-

racy" is not going to help the situation though that is the only thing that Delhi could think of doing to keep its collaborators fighting with each other to evade addressing the real malaise. Stone pelting is not an invention of Kashmiris to be condemned by the Fatwas of rented moulvis and muftis but is universally resorted to by people to show their anger and resistance against the undesirable regimes policies and programmes of the govts and to press for their demands and rights including the right to self-determination and demand of justice for atrocities committed and the repealing of laws that legitimize such atrocities. Greece, the cradle of civilization, has witnessed stone throwing by dissenting populace in the recent past against the govt of the day but no bullets were showered on them or Tuesday's protests in Belfast of northern Ireland should serve as an eye-opener for the policing methods in the valley as has been emphasized by Greater Kashmir editorial of Thursday particularly because there are similarities between the two situations. Or closer home in different parts of India there are violent commotions everyday but nobody gets killed even' incidentally.' in these agitations.

In fact nowhere in the world are stones responded to with bullets or detentions of stone throwers except in Kashmir under the most arbitrarily misused Public Safety Act because Kashmiris are treated as an extension of the enemy -Pakistan, not "our own people " as is time and again being parroted to control the territory. Even for the sake of that argument govt could have shown sympathy to the suffering masses and taken steps to assuage the hurt feelings but instead it used and continues to use all terrorizing methods to suppress the people as is evident by 800 detentions in the past two weeks But his-

tory is a witness to the fact that these coercive methods have only intensified people's resolve to fight back. Even after the detention of "rabble-rousers" like Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Nayeem Ahmad Khan, protests have continued unabated. One can take the present situation as post Geelani. In his absence youth is more determined to carry the struggle to its desired goal, and therefore the detentions have not served any purpose but only aggravated the anger. What adds pepper to the raw injuries is the vicious campaign carried out by sections of media especially electronic like Times Now TV channel through its anchor Arnob Goswami who shamelessly and repeatedly spewed poisonous and provocative statements with finality that it is the paid and rented mourners who are protesting on the streets of Srinagar. He tried to put together clumsily intercepts of conversations to prove the Lashkar hand in fomenting trouble in the state. What gave one some relief was Mani Shanker Ayer's snubbing him time and again for playing the role of a prosecutor rather than an anchor. Other channels for fear of lagging behind in displaying their 'nationalism' tried to overtake his channel in the race for confusing the people of India with cooked up tales. It is utter crassness of Indian State government, its denial of the existence of genuine demands and the fabrications of different agencies in the face of killing of young boys that acted like fuel to the fire. This is basically how New Delhi has always responded to Kashmiris' cry for justice and their demand for political empowerment. As a result every barbarity and every act of inhumanity against Kashmiris is justified in the name of pseudo and jingoistic nationalism and national security. Even today when mothers' hearts have been torn asunder and they are terribly worried about the safety and security of their children, government continues to

terrorize them with the might of army, police and paramilitary forces with imprisonments of their young ones and by other terror tactics. While women in large numbers came out to protest against the savage and merciless killing of teen age boys, government agencies and embedded journalists in Delhi are busy in vicious disinformation campaign. But what is encouraging are some sane voices from Delhi like oases in the desert who did not only empathize with the people of Kashmir but plead for the speedy resolution of the political issue which is deeply embedded in the collective psyche of Kashmiris and erupts every now and then when the system creates such situations which reminds people time and again how colonized and besieged they are by a country which has the distinction of being the largest democracy on earth and despite multiple ruptures and discontinuities the yearning for release from the vicious circle does not change its character though it may change its form from time to time.

The greatest sufferer in all this as in the past are women whose families have been devastated, personalities disintegrated, souls bruised, bodies benumbed, minds immobilized and nerves paralysed. After marriage women generally live for their children. They become the axis around which their existence revolves. Once they lose their children, they lose their life force. They experience a vacuum inside as well as outside. They become living dead bodies and their devastated lives spread their wings around and affect not only a family but the whole community. And when the killings are the handiwork of those who are supposed to protect, the pain is felt in every vein and artery of the community. That is why any sensitive soul who visits from outside can at once

feel the devastation writ large on the people and the landscape of Kashmir. Only a humane and just intervention from powers can bring life back to a devastated populace. The government of India must, if it has an iota of concern for people and wants to find a way out of the present situation, repeal AFSPA, PSA, DDA, release all those young boys and political leaders and activists who have been arrested, institute a fast track enquiry into the brutal killings to give exemplary punishment to the guilty within fifteen days. Then only can the government douse the flames of public outrage to some extent and not by listening to the advice of hawks in the establishment and those vested-interest groups and persons who have been telling the government of India that people will cool down after sometime and resume normal life on their own and that there is no need to do anything because that is how they thrive on the feasting wounds of Kashmir. Today even the collaborators of Delhi in the state have felt compelled to speak the truth about Kashmir and stressed the need for a speedy solution of the Kashmir issue. It is the vested interests of many players that has devastated Kashmir and deadened the Indian conscience which I am sure will rise to the occasion if shown the clear picture of Kashmir and will address the issues in a humane manner as Atal Behari Vajpai had proposed and not to look at it through Pakistani and security prism. It is the recognition and endorsement of Kashmiris' rights movement by both India and Pakistan which will open the way out from the perpetual impasse in which we have been trapped for the past over sixty years. This is not the time to dilly dally and make customary statements that the problem cannot be solved tomorrow or within months. This is the time to act in dead earnest to resolve the issue in time bound framework through a structured dialogue.

That alone can release the Kashmiris' collective soul from agony and India and Pakistan could get a release from the sinister burden of history. Hope this anguished cry is heard in the corridors of power lest we plunge into an abyss from which there could be no return!

Creative Approaches on Kashmir-I

We cannot talk about the Kashmir issue and offer suggestions for its viable solution unless we keep the genesis of Kashmir dispute in mind and refer back and forth to it as a rhythmic refrain to keep us within the defined parameters. Otherwise one would be talking in the ivory towers or indulging in dull, dry academic discussion with no reference to the stark ground reality or to a norm; or approaching it as a mathematical problem in the realms of abstraction or giving subjective solutions based on individual representations of Kashmir diametrically opposite to objectivity and democratic principles.

The genesis of Kashmir issue or more specifically Kashmir tragedy as we suffer it today, lies in the clashing of India and Pakistan in Kashmir to take its territorial control which prompted Pt. Nehru to take the matter to the Security Council. Contrary to his expectations, the Security Council resolutions granted the power of deciding the future dispensation of the State to the people of J and K, neither to India or Pakistan nor to any Kashmiri leader or the king. This provides the key to the solution of Kashmir imbroglio though we can make some modifications to make the solution feasible and viable in the present scenario without violating the basic democratic spirit of the right to self-determination.

But ever since India has been backtracking on these resolutions and the commitments made by Pt. Nehru as

the first Prime Minister of free India, whereas Pakistan has stuck to the resolutions assured in the knowledge that Kashmiris' decision will be in its favour. As Jinnah is supposed to have said, "Kashmir will fall into our lap like a ripe fruit". Pertinent to mention that his confidence was not misplaced.

In this brief paper I will argue why all other so-called creative approaches and solutions are highly problematic as they do not appropriate the essence of the right to self-determination which is not only guaranteed by the international community but is the birth right of all communities and nations and for whose realization the people of Kashmir have given colossal sacrifices from 1947 generally and from 1989 particularly.

India has been trying to dilute the essence of this right by citing fraudulent elections for the formation of governments from time to time in which even when people have participated, they have done so with the clear intention of forming governments for which the elections were fought and not for deciding the political future of the State. Yet India has time and again flagrantly presented elections as a substitute of referendum before the international community. But these have been practically nullified by the resistance movement.

On the other hand, over the past 16 years as the armed conflict has been raging, India has been overemphasizing socio, religio, ethno and regional diversity as a way of puncturing any forward movement on the democratic solution to the Kashmir problem and for perpetrating the status quo. In fact she has been working on a war foot to create more and more wedges and interest groups who claim to be the stake-holders on Kashmir. This nefarious design to marginalize Kashmiris has got into its loop

'NGOs' and 'Kashmir experts' from outside the State and also divided one community into sub-groups both in Muslims in the minuscule minority of Pandits. The two so-called roundtable conferences are an ample demonstration of this design where a blizzard of view-points are voiced which are basically assembled to support the status quo in Kashmir with some packages ironically not for those in the vanguard of the current movement, whereas Pakistan encouraged the formation of a large number of political groups in the freedom camp so that none has finally the absolute right like Shiekh Abdullah to go for a sellout.

Ironically, this has fitted only too well with Indian designs as she intensified these divisions by her own machinations to disperse the broadly monolithic Kashmiri voice.

Going for any adhoc solution based on the proposals and suggestions put forth either by the Kashmir Study Group or by individuals and political parties which fall short of the basic parameters, will never solve the problem but rather perpetuate the hegemonistic and monopolistic grip of traditional stooges in the state while people will continue to suffer as before and remain totally disconnected and disengaged from manipulated orchestrated democratic processes. In a situation where society has been fragmented on religious, regional and sectarian lines, how can a solution proposed by some worked out by some and settled with some encompass the views and opinions of the entire J and K state which is a primary requisite for a viable solution? No political party has a right to hold people hostage either to its rigid views and position nor to a liberal position which goes against the rights of people.

Whether it is the reorganization of the State – called

Untied States of Kashmir with separate assemblies, on ethno regional basis, which addresses the question of the division of powers within the state rather than to resolve the Kashmir issue or the division of the State along religious and regional lines or the restoration of the 53 position and plus, or the so-called self-rule which is 'emasculated autonomy' as defined by a particular political group, will only create further oppression, instability, insecurity confusion, chaos and uncertainty as these will leave out the marginalized inarticulate majority of people. Neither will an emotional slogan shorn of the substance of strategic vision nor bending too much which goes against the rights of people, do.

History bears witness to the fact that political and geographical and all such issues of national importance are finally resolved not by some leaders or individuals or representatives of a few constituencies but by the collectivity inspired by creative minority. It is the will of the people and not their leaders or politicians that finally triumphs at the end of the day. Democracy has been the inner logic of history. The people, the majority voice, have always counted. Misdeeds of individuals or decisions of politicians/leaders do not ultimately count though short-term gains are always there for them.

History also bears witness to the fact that communities and nations often resort to simplest solutions to their problems. Solutions to most complex problems are usually simple in both mathematics and politics and when we do not have the will to solve the problems; we compound them by approaching them through devious routes or just pretend there are no solutions. Sectarian feuds in both religion and politics are solved best by transcending the very sectarian approach and not by working out some

formula of keeping all the sects pleased. When many vultures attack a single prey, none of them finally gets it.

Manufactured Sectional views distort the original pristine reality. When the managed stake-holds are many, we are faced with epistemic dilemma. And it is impossible to get out of that impasse where there is no genuine democratic norm applied to determine the truth-claim of each. Therefore, epistemic sovereignty within a context of democratic postmodern set-up is best appropriated in referendum or, if you like, the old phrase 'plebiscite'.

India emphasizes the lack of representative character of those who are fighting for the right to self-determination and the Kashmiris are tired of reiterating that the so-called elected representatives are staged through fraudulent and forcibly conducted elections. And the leaders of the movement 'imposed or 'self-styled' and 'self-righteous' or the genuine ones have not retained the faith of the people because of internal squabbles due to the petty lusty egos and the dilution of commitment to cause in some under the spell of material allurements. The question arises: who should, therefore, represent Kashmir on the negotiating table with India and Pakistan? By her own admission India says that no group enjoys the popular support. How could it then arbitrarily choose one group to negotiate with on Kashmir or hold roundtable conference where all the divergent views of individuals, political groups and 'NGOs' are brought on board, to marginalize the master narrative of Kashmiri struggle for the right to self-determination?

This is simply an unjust and outrageous maneuver and tantamount to the assassination of the spirit of democratic principles and human rights of the majority of voiceless people as it leaves them out. It cannot even synthesize dif-

ferent perspectives. That synthesis is only a dream, an impossible dream as we have seen in case of India before independence. The Muslim League and the Congress in spite of the best efforts of Jinnah and Gandhi later on could not forge a unity. To reach some consensus at this level by some form of negotiations of give and take seems plausible but is bound to lead to a state of unstable equilibrium and therefore bound to be short-lived.

The dispute of Kashmir is basically the dispute over the hermeneutics (interpretation) of representation and political sovereignty. If Sheikh Abdullah, the tallest leader so far could be called representative of Kashmiris unproblematically, there would have been no need to raise the issue now after his hobnobbing with India in 1947 and his accord with Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1975 after abandoning his Plebiscite Front.

In fact, armed resistance justly interrogated his right to make a pact. So neither a tall leader like Shiekh Abdullah who went against the popular will nor the "elected leaders" or collaborators nor the leaders of any denomination in freedom camp could unproblematically represent the entire J and K state. So the primary question is: whose Kashmir India's or Pakistan's or whose recognized leaders - people's or India's or Pakistan's? Kashmiris have solid reasons to distrust all those who claim to speak on their behalf. So what to do in such a situation? Easing borders and letting people interact with each other is only putting a lid on the steam or volcano as it does not change their political status. This is only a CBM to pave the way eventually for political sovereignty.

The restricted movement and amount of labour required to get the permission to cross the line of control has left people with a bitter taste and there are now hardly

any takers of the so-called Aman Bus. A solution – that would be acceptable to both India and Pakistan – is a semantic as well as a logical absurdity or at best tautological of the fixed positions given the things as they are though I must hasten to add that president General Musharraf has been able to move away along with the majority of Pakistanis from the frozen embrace of the past and has made a paradigmatic shift from dispute-centric to people-centric approach. He has publicly declared that it is primarily the satisfaction and aspirations of Kashmiris which is of paramount importance and has not used his 'Pakistan first refrain' to tighten his claim on Kashmir. India continues to live in the tight and frozen embrace of the ossified and fossilized position of the past and nothing short of her continued grip on Kashmir is acceptable to her. In fact she is using novel ways of tightening her grip on Kashmir through the railway project underway and recent land lease decision in favour of non-Kashmiris through the State government and the proposal of the Army General to make residential quarters in the State for army to fight against their emotional insecurity. This move is designed to concretize the occupation in the Valley and shrink the space for natives at the territorial level.

And at the people's level Kashmiris' voice is being punctured, fragmented by over-emphasis on sectarian and party politics, regional divide and by co-opting other divisive, suppressive, marginalizing stratagems to create a monumental confusion of mutually contradictory blizzard of viewpoints.

The question is fundamentally of Kashmir and not of India or Pakistan and the primary satisfaction and acceptability of the solution is to be examined in relation to Kashmiris whose rights have been denied or put on hold

or placed under suspended animation and the two countries have to restore to them their basic right to determine their future. It is India as of now that does not recognize the epistemic/political sovereignty of the grand narrative of Kashmir struggle and it is she who has to change her cliché-ridden – stultified stance for a new dawn in South Asia.

The fundamental question therefore is how to do just gaming and attend to difference and to avoid what Lyotard calls meaning closure and epistemic chauvinism of phrase regimes as the logo of different political parties seems to be different language games incommensurable with each other. So we have no other alternative but to take up every little narrative and add them up and that is what referendum does. No other method is so simple and so much reflective of the essence of the democratic spirit as referring it to people to determine their political future.

The extremely politicized terrain of all discourse (knowledge – power nexus) is here otherwise to confuse and confound any simplistic position because Kashmir history and politics allure polyphonic, polyvalent and thus divergent representations of the issue as it has been constructed by contesting parties and writers. But in spite of all this and what the postmodern world would say that reality is almost un-representable or sublime, we could still identify the dominant major, irreducible, un-ignorable real in any situation which consists of the real people who live in a place and we could identify this inarticulate, voiceless, unheard, unattended and unsung majority of people through referendum which is otherwise marginalized by the few articulate and powerful individuals and groups who claim to represent the entire State or a major part of it.

Now if the feasible and viable solution at this juncture is less than total political sovereignty as is evident from President Musharraf's four-point proposals which seem to be imbued with pragmatic sagacity as starting points, the arrangement worked out on the broadest definition of these proposals between India and Pakistan could have sanctity and viability only when ratified by Kashmiris through referendum. No group or party has the mandate from people to accept or reject these proposals or the resultant arrangement or agreement arrived at between India and Pakistan. There is no harm in consulting these leaders and groups by India and Pakistan but the final endorsement of the agreement has to come from people.

The referendum for this purpose could be held under the supervision of eminent men and women of integrity, with impeccable credentials from India and Pakistan and if it gets 80% votes, from people of Kashmir, it will be workable. Who knows, if India and Pakistan stick to the implementation of the agreement in letter and spirit and India stops its manipulations of the agreement in letter and spirit and India stops its manipulations at various levels in the self-governing sovereign State, this agreement may become 'The Solution'. As in the ultimate analysis Kashmiris will not like to sever their vital human links with India and Pakistan as their immediate South Asian community but they would like to keep the links alive only when they enjoy absolute internal sovereignty without any interference from India or Pakistan. Therefore this should have international safeguards to prevent the backtracking on the implementation of the agreement by India and Pakistan. However, in order to clear the road and build a congenial atmosphere to enable people to participate creatively and without any fear, the primary requisite is the

withdrawal of all forces from both parts of Kashmir simultaneously, immediate stoppage of violations of all human rights:

1. The abolition of all draconian laws like Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and PSA and other anti-people dreaded laws.
2. Abolition of SOGs and Disarming of renegades
3. Unconditional restoration of all human rights including the right to freedom of speech and expression and the right to travel.
4. Release of all prisoners of war languishing in jails.
5. Facilitating the safe return of all Kashmiris from across the border and those who are residing in Jammu and Delhi.
6. Immediate unilateral cease-fire by the government forces to be followed by cease-fire by militants.
7. Setting up of an enquiry commission consisting of impartial judges to enquire into all the atrocities like disappearances, custodial deaths, rapes and so-called encounter killings and destruction of immovable properties.
8. Immediate stoppage of crackdowns and search and destroy operations in the valley.
9. Facilitating intra- and inter-Kashmiri dialogue among various regions and sects and between two Kashmir so that Kashmiris can freely build consensus about the agreement arrived at between India and Pakistan on Kashmir and can vote in the full knowledge of what they are going for.

Women Making a Difference

Since women have never been the prime movers of any political or military action or any bilateral or unilateral conflict primarily because of their biological roles those of child-bearers and child-rearers, they are intrinsically the torch-bearers of peace and stability, warmth and affection, whereas an armed conflict literally overnight annihilates everything that a woman as a social and filial category has strived to be and to build.

However, defining women only by their biological roles is problematic and gives birth to gender inequalities and the stultifying oppression of women.

On the other hand, R. Berewa Jommo would have us believe that "deconstructing from a woman's perspective, their biological and economic roles at both household and community levels and the manner in which these roles are influenced by armed conflict reveals issues which give women the moral authority to claim their place of honour as agents of peace and reconciliation". For example, women creatively integrate society, nourish and nurture life from its embryonic stage, socialize the young and look after the old and decrepit.

These roles generally give women a close affinity with

life, even as they open up opportunities for interaction, interchange, solidarity-building across all sorts of socio-cultural divides.

In agricultural societies women are the backbone of subsistence economy. It is their productive work that sustains families and communities.

In Kashmir military actions first target the woman as homemaker, economic manager and as chastity-observer. They routinely torch her house and the godown where she stores food and seeds, mix eatables with coals, ashes and clay, break their electronic gadgetry, tear off carpets, search the innermost recesses of their modesty, to break the will of the people, they plunder her chastity which is symbolically the devastation of the entire social unit of which she is apart. Thus within hours everything a woman has tried to be and to do can be destroyed. The trauma and destitution of women is compounded by the fact that there is no outlet for relief. Men can gather anywhere and let off the steam, women have to continue to cater for family and community needs, even during a flight. Secondly, it is an onslaught on the privacy of women. It is as if they are stripped off all the protected armour and are left naked. 'Unaccommodated man is no more than an animal, observe him well', what about unaccommodated woman and her young ones?

How much more credible and authentic would she be as an agent of peace! Women are domestic and community level peace-makers because they generally abhor violence, being its victims time and again. We do not generally associate terms such as plunder, predate, exploit, conquer, invade, attack, oppress, suppress, avarice, abuse, corruption, aggression and manipulation with women.

According to Berewa Jommo "What is it that women are not, what do they not do, or what do they not have to, give them the moral authority to speak out against war and armed conflict".

Except perhaps in strong matrilineal societies women may give their name to a clan or community, but they are never permanent members of family, clan or community. They buy the privilege of temporary residence by being and doing everything society expects of them. Then they are expected to pass into custody of men who may or may not accord them the privilege of a family, clan or community identity. In some societies women can even be inherited but everywhere they are disinherited from their cultural birthright without any one so much as raising an eyebrow. They may not even carry the same name from birth to death, unless they die very young.

As hinted earlier, women do not feature in any significant way in the political power structures which provide the arena for confrontation that lead to war or conflict. At the most in any govt. women are allotted the social welfare department or childcare which from patriarchal point of view is their natural domain. Hence women do not take part in decisions for armed conflict; they have in general never been in the mainstream of the decisions-making process for going to war. In situations in history where they have been rulers or even military leaders, decisions of this nature are made on the advice or pressure of high command - - - the generals, who are and always have been, overwhelmingly male.

An armed conflict is most of the times the outcome of power struggle, struggle for the territorial expansion and the will to dominate the 'other', these are aggravated, if not generated, by the desire to control natural resources

or exploit the potential for tourism as in Kashmir.

In general, even though women are the key managers of a country's land resources and are therefore the first to be affected by loss, they do not own them. Traditionally, women as a social category generally did not go into active service in war.

African war 'conventions' protected the lives of women, children and the elderly. Woman and children were looted by the winners as booty, the elderly were left to tell the story.

It is a terrible sign of the times that the weapons of indiscriminate mass killing (land mines, missiles, machine guns) now constitute the central tools of terror. The atrocities of Rwanda are even more horrific because of the deliberate bloodying of the hands of women and children. Equally horrific is the violence borne by women in Kashmir and the killing of milk-sucking babies and children to break the backbone of the freedom movement in Kashmir; rape is used as a weapon of violating the communal honour and suppression of dissent.

Many things happen to women in civil strife in conflict zones that give strong motivation for peaceful resolution of the conflict. There are strong evidences in conflict zones about the use of women's bodies as weapons. Even where she will be eventually killed, a woman is subjected to the most horrendous physical violation. For survivors, a woman has lost all forever; the widow is likely to remain such for the rest of her life; children are lost forever. Men can remarry and start afresh, even in old age. Very few women have such an option. Those women in Kashmir, who have revealed, having been raped, face alienation and social isolation. Out of the 32 women raped

in Kanan Poshpora not even a single one has been accepted in marriage since 1991.

However in other instances she may overcome some aspects of the trauma and rebuild her life economically, but a woman can never reconstitute the institution of family even though she was a key performer in its construction.

Researchers need to grapple with conceptual and analytical frameworks of promoting women as agents of peace in such a way as to elaborate lines of action based on a consensus that what women are, do, or do not do, does not necessarily make them weak. On the contrary, it makes them stake-holders in peaceful resolution of conflict. It gives them the moral authority and the credibility to say, "stop", and to mediate for peaceful resolution of conflict.

This may explain the success of some of the traditional strategies that women use when things got out of hand, for instance, the elderly Agikuyu women's act of showing nakedness was a curse for which they had to be appeased by the immediate ceasure of the cause of the women's displeasure. In Ethiopia a community of women would physically step between the warring parties.

In Kashmir women have most of the times demonstrated when their kith and kin are arrested, killed in custody, tortured in interrogation or when women have been raped. They have also protested against the excesses of armed militants, showed their displeasure time and again which has really stepped the militant excesses against the common civilians. Kashmiri women have led massive peaceful demonstrations in the entire Valley against Indian occupation and their courage, peace-loving nature

and determination could bring pride to any nation but have not been heeded by the warring side and crushed with army action time and again. Researches need to study, document and disseminate these traditional strategies in order to devise mechanisms for mediation which women can control themselves. Male-dominated structures such as round tables put women at a disadvantage from the outset; they are ball game in which the rules are male-determined. This is not to say that women should not accept the challenge to cultivate a culture where their perspective, not just their presence, influences politics and all other spheres which have a bearing on peaceful co-existence.

In my part of the world, it is the moral responsibility of the women of India and Pakistan to get into alliance with Kashmiri women and persuade their respect Govts. to shun the path of violence, resolve the conflict in the interests of Kashmiri people, especially the women who have suffered enormously, work for closer co-operation in developmental programs. As in the post- Independence era, they have diverted their huge funds for military build-up and nuclearization and left half of their population starving.

It is the greater responsibility of women all over the globe to build alliances and make their voice heard internationally against violence and armed conflicts and plead and work for their speedy resolutions. If women could build these alliances globally, they would become a force to reckon with and compel the male-dominated structure policies and institutions to change their confrontation and the govts. Then work together with men to make the world a better peaceful place to live in.

**Dawat-E-Fikr: Compiled
by Dr. Agha Ashraf Ali.**

This book of essays compiled by Agha Ashraf Ali is intended to serve as a prelude to a new dawn in the intellectual life of Kashmiris who in spite of getting routine education, have not learned to think, question and debate issues freely to get rid of the dead customs and conventionality and mental torpor. 'Education' seems to have only contaminated the general public and debilitated them to think over and reflect on things which challenge us today.

The book is a collection of essays from the great Muslim masters of the 20th century. These display the highest level of refinement and sophistication of mind. The perspectives that emerge from the essays are progressive, modernist, Universalist, unrestrained by narrow vision, yet averse to an absolute latitudinarian attitude to life, they tacitly advocate humble submission to a discipline derived from the Quran and Sunnah which have paradoxically the effect of liberating us from thousand mental slaveries.

Dawat-E-Fikr is truly an open invitation to think, discuss, debate, doubt and question things we take for granted. It encourages us to discard all that which thwarts the natural growth of mind, freedom of spirit and the

advancement of human society. It is an invitation to creatively involve ourselves in making and breaking the ideas and to nurture the ideas which are in concord with the values derived from the timeless essence of the scripture and to re-orient Quranic injunctions and symbols to find answers to the current challenges.

The book appropriately begins with a eulogy to the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) – 'Song of Muhammad' interestingly by a great European sage and poet Goethe, who has been able to encapsulate the essence of the Prophet (PBUH) which sets the tone of the book.

The rest of the essays represent most important voices of South Asian Muslims with one exception of Imam-E-Ghazali but the theme of his essay directly links him with the 20th century thinkers which is to encourage questioning of things as they are and to undertake an odyssey through the valleys of doubt and skepticism in order to arrive at the 'truth', the objective reality of things, the world and the self.

Let me give a brief resume of some of the essays to bring home the point. Dr Mohd Iqbal, in his essay 'The National Life' (Quamie Zindagi, 1902) compares the past with the present and says that unless and until we live in harmony with the zeitgeist (time spirit) the changed conditions of life, we will not be able to survive and live in dignity. In comparison to the past reliance on muscle power, there is a new silent power of knowledge which sustains the nations in the present day world. Where there is a tussle of minds, civilizations and cultures and only those who adapt to changing realities, would survive and dominate. In fact, constant changelessness in change is the fundamental principle of all life on this planet and Muslims have to understand this paradigmatic dynamism

to be able to live with dignity and honour. Their tendency to cling to irrational, mindless orthodoxy would prove suicidal.

Wahidud-in Khan in 'Reconstruction of Islamic thought', emphasizes time and again the need to re-interpret Quran in tune with the current times and to codify laws accordingly. Instead of engaging in self-defeatist militarism, Muslims should empower themselves with modern education-science and technological know-how and defeat the 'enemy' with her own weapons as was done by Christian Europeans when Muslims were in ascendancy. Without openly challenging and confronting Muslim domination, they armed themselves with the knowledge over which, Muslims had then the sole monopoly. In fact, they generated more knowledge and improved upon the Muslim legacy which helped them to change the course of history. Muslims in this race took a back seat because their leaders did not provide them with proper guidance for progress, as they were devoid of the capacity to re-interpret the scripture, farsightedness or broad vision.

Dr. Zakir Hussain in 'Character Building' emphasizes four cardinal virtues for character-building. Each word in the essay is worth-treasuring and capable of transforming us and our attitude towards society, beyond recognition. No less significant is Prof. Mujeeb's 'Aligarh Address' in which besides other things, he distinguishes between the 'givers' and 'takers' by comparing the giving hand with a spring of fresh water, and the 'receiving hand with a gutter thereby privileging magnanimity and denouncing miserliness.

In the extract from 'The Preface to Tarjumanul-Quran' Maulana Azad says in his inimitable style that there

is no certitude in his heart which has not passed through the process of skepticism and no conviction which has not been beguiled by the trials of denial. 'When I was thirsty. I didn't make a public display of my thirst and when I received refreshing waters, my brimming spring too did not become a thorough-fare on display. In the 'Educational Spirit of Surah Fateh' Azad asserts that this Surah gives the concept of a cosmopolitan human being who transcends all barriers, and boundaries as he does not invoke a sectarian god but a God of universal mercy, a God of all the worlds. Mohd Mujeeb in 'Dr Iqbal' written at the time of his death, distinguishes between two kinds of personalities small personalities are like boats of the sea ever careful about which direction to take. They crave for the sails of popularity and the winds of national emotions to turn in their favour, only then, could they dare to reach the shore and display their ingenuity. But a great personality is like that wave which penetrates the heart of the sea and is disdainful of reaching the shore. Such a wave is her own destination. It thrives on restlessness and turmoil in the sea. Iqbal was such a wave and his sea was the world of Islam and he shook the sea to its very bottom.

While rising like a wave, he kissed the sky and while receding, he touched the bottom of the sea.

Put literally, Iqbal had cultivated by constant doubting, questioning and intuitive reasoning such attributes which are the hallmarks of true faith, genuine humanity and true knowledge. All those emotions that are steady and lie deep down in the community and lend new forms to life every now and then had taken their permanent seat in his heart and had made him such a paragon of wholeness on seeing whom History exclaims! Yes! This is it! And

Religion pronounces- This is how it should be! And people of all ages express their great desire to be like that!

The implication is clear, a personality is strong and rich in the proportion in which it goes beyond literalism and petty pursuit of personal glory, and arrives at truth through trials of the spirit, for it is this which brings in the positive dynamism, the dramatic tension that fortifies a personality and makes it relevant for the society.

For the Kashmiris who have lived in abject slavery and are passing through a confused, corrupt and uncertain present but crave for a virgin tomorrow, this book will help to retrieve their lost legacy and build their individual and collective character on solid and strong basis which could preserve the great traditions, discard unnecessary baggage, and put them on a path where there is no conflict between mind and spirit.

Freedom Struggle - Achievements and Challenges - Oct 1995

**Presented at a Seminar in October 1995.
Organized by APHC.**

Let me congratulate APHC at the very outset that at long last it has come out of the cloistered shell into the forefold of public domain to interact with its literate class. The need of the hour is to make APHC a vibrant force on strong democratic lines. Intellectuals should form the backbone of Hurriyat. In any civilized society, intellectuals are the prime movers of events. It is from them that ideas flow which are translated into action by political class and other segments of society. They provide the guiding principle for the proper steering of the ship of a nation. Their role is much more crucial when a nation is passing through a crisis. Our intelligential did play an effective role till we lost some prominent members to the on-going movement. Now the majority of this section of our society has taken a backseat. They have withdrawn into their private closets, become indifferent to the happenings around them. They are in the grip of a terrible fear which is understandable but not justifiable. The question is: could we take recourse to apathy and fear? The impervious avoidance of making a verbal statement on the situation is a fatal sin even in aesthetic terms. A life lived in the fear of death is worse than-the worst of deaths; it is a perpetual

evil, a living death, an instrument of torture for the conscientious and stinking of the macabre to say the least.

Another point I want to make before coming to grips with the topic of the seminar is that women along with men have made a substantial contribution to the freedom movement ever since 1947 at various levels. But they have remained mostly unsung heroines because they would not articulate their voices in public in spite of being the providers of steam for the boat of collective struggle. Here I am neither to eulogise nor to eulogise them but to tell you that I have been trying in my own way to fill that vacuum from time to time on various occasions.

Right now we are passing through the worst period of our history. W.B Yeats seems to sums up our situation very aptly:

Things fall apart

The centre cannot hold

Mere anarchy is loosed upon us

The bold-dimmed tide is loose

And everywhere the ceremony

Of innocence is drowned.

The best lack all conviction

And the worse are full of passionate intensity

We are caught up in a quagmire and it is our collective responsibility to find a way out lest our history should have a last laugh at us, us who have set out to set the time right but seem to be dithering in a dilemma. What is happening now is intolerable to thought and odious to the soul. Dilemmas will come and go. These are temporary phases. With cool thinking and perseverance we must find a way out rather than go for short-term marriages with power politics. We are no doubt in the grip of debilitat-

ing cynicism, immobilizing depression and mental torpor, not so much because of the unprecedented atrocities unleashed by the State upon us as of the cracks in our own mirror, as of the contradictions within the freedom camp, as of the lack of moral rectitude and dilution of commitment in the leadership. The cruel irony is that the system against which we had risen up in arms is being paradoxically perpetrated by those on the forefront of the movement. Deception is most sinister when it becomes self-deception. It is time the political class across the political divide turn inwards and saw the rot within before it wastes them away imperceptibly. The first step to self-correction is self-criticism and the second step is to assimilate, criticism with a smile and not a scowl.

Coming now to the topic of the seminar, freedom is an immeasurable concept and hence there is no rod, or scale, to measure it down in concrete terms. It is not a finite tangible achievement entity especially in the fast-changing, pluralistic interdependent, self-aware and ironic society, where we are not ourselves, we are meeting points, crossroads, intersections, flickering impermanent points of light and irradiating stretches.

Having said that because of my awareness of its far-reaching philosophical, economic, sociological and political implications, our struggle, therefore, more appropriately is for the right to self-determination which has achieved at least two things so far. Even though it is too naïve and simplistic to be self-congratulatory too early and to calculate achievements where there are none in concrete terms. The resistance movement of previous years has erased the age old stigma of cowardice from our collective character. We had lived too long in moral dormancy took in a most abject and despicable way, the very fact

that the struggle was launched to shed off the humiliating sluggishness and mental torpor, to liberate the spirit from the clutches of manipulative politics, with its heavy military presence is no mean achievement. Ultimately the soul must have what it wants and the material allurements are not enough. Because the surface of reality and the heart of reality are inevitably separate matters.

There is a great chasm between the disciplined world of mind and language and the world of essences at the centre of experience in whose search we set out irrespective of the cost we would bear. Secondly, the resistance movement has succeeded in driving out the Kashmir problem from the cold store of oblivion to the broad day light in the hub of world politics, we have been able to break loose out of the conventional inertia and threw open the gates of revolution while staking every thing for liberation from the colonial yoke. Our passion for liberation bordered on frenzy. Our collective soul hopped ad danced in tune with the cosmic music of the Great Spirit, cracking and ripping apart the tyrannical yoke of slavery irrespective of any other consideration whatsoever. As Shafaq Sopore so effectively put it.

But within no time something went wrong somewhere and the cracks became visible in the whole structure. Things started fizzling out. A steady retrogression began from the peak of heady 1990, 91 leading to disintegration and a relapse into darkness of despair and passivity as if it were an entranced langour. All this happened no doubt due to the ghastly terror let loose by the forces and the counter-insurgency tactics adopted by the state, the fierce propaganda machinery geared to create confusion and establish ideological hegemony, the operations of the serpentine intelligence agencies to sow seeds of dissen-

sion in militant ranks and other means to create a confusing pluralistic vision of the ground reality and a blizzard of conflicting viewpoints whereby any final lasting solution of Kashmir issue is presented as an impossibility. The alternative is offered in terms of a façade of elections which have been invalidated here beyond any doubt as a surrogate to referendum for resolving the issue.

However, the evil also has within our resistance forces both at the political and the military level. While resisting they got entrapped by the dazzling allurements of materialism with all its attendant evils, bloated egos, personal venom and vendetta for those who did not agree with them and conveniently forgot the real destination as if they had set out to settle scores not with the dominant power but with their own people and then:

It is as if a house was converted into a brothel. Pardon me for being so nakedly truthful but I cannot act as a balm to soothe minds given the things as they are.

Looking at the situation from the perspective of commonality, our dignity lies in our graceful suffering, in the very act of endurance, when our collective soul is in agony. The very fact that we invited whole sale suffering to liberate the spirit from degrading subjugation and manipulations is a feat of courage. The fact that in the very act of defiance, we get ecstasy and exhilaration which no earthly luxury could match. We have exorcised the ghost of fear from our midst.

Challenge too is a shimmering fluid reality and keeps on changing every now and then. It is not a constant entity like a problem. Keeping this in mind, we can enumerate some of the challenges in categorical terms. Our general public is soaked in tepid skepticism and it is a

great challenge to pull them out of the abyss of doubt and despair into the light of belief in our cause and the need to sustain it with fresh zeal and enthusiasm. We need to persuade and inculcate in people the virtues of perseverance, fortitude and unflinching commitment to higher values of freedom, justice and genuine democracy.

Because the entire state machinery is locked in the process of attitudinizing in changing minds, in manipulating ease-loving, self-negating, identity-shattering attitudes in people, desirable for itself in the valley of sorrows and heart-break.

It is issuing forth nothing but lies, lies, a pack of lies and what is most deplorable are the lies of historical facts. It is trying to bamboozle not only our people but the world community by its cherished devices of circumlocution, convolution, periphrases, rigma role, subterfuges and, atrociously distorted selection of facts to evade attention from the real problem and the crimes committed against humanity by its forces.

This reminds me of E.M Forester's celebrated novel-- *A Passage to India*. Where two British ladies Mrs Moore and Miss Adela Quested are baffled and shattered by the Indian symbolic sensibility embodied in the Malabar Caves' echo-Boum Oboum. Whether you speak lofty poetry or chant religious truths or spit or light a match stick, the response is the same-- 'boum O' boum? The establishment is articulating exactly the same learned of kind to our cries of liberation from colonial control or our cries of pain and suffering. The common masses are not able to see beyond the surface reality as interpreted by state-sponsored media and are easily misled. All attempts by it point toward pulling a Panjab in the state.

Elections do provide choices during anarchy arising out of the breakdown of law and order and hence no one could be opposed to them in such situations anywhere in the world. But elections are a preposterous absurdity in places like Kashmir where it is used as a ploy to murder democracy, assassinate democratic aspirations of having our own sovereignty by deflecting attention from them. Here in the name of justice and democracy, gross and wild injustice is committed. As Rawls says, "truth is to ideas as fairness is to institutions". Unfair and unwanted elections and democracy is a contradiction in terms.

Peace cannot be imposed from without. It comes from within and that is possible only when the root cause of the conflict is addressed satisfactorily to find a viable solution. All other superficial prescriptions including the wrongly diagnosed antibiotic dose of manipulated elections can only worsen the disease and take the body politic on the verge of annihilation from which there would be no return. Elections as a prescription for peace is a deception and prostitution of collective psyche which is outrageous, to say the least. "O foolish physician! Get thee gone from near my pillow The love sick does not need your prescription but a lasting union with his beloved."

The disease has become severe today not because of the absence of elections but precisely because of the unfair and manipulated ones. The leadership has to make people understand

It is high time for Indian state to change its ossified official thinking, to discard the orthodox, clicke-ridden, stereotyped lifeless legal arguments and the false and morally vapid notions of national pride and prestige and use its time-honoured wisdom of great Vedas in solving the problem once for all, by granting us our right to self-

determination. By so doing, she will definitely rise in international stature and get a seat in the Security Council of the UN for which she is striving very hard and can play a larger role in global politics.

However, the great challenge within is the dire need of the resistance forces leaders to join their hands and unite themselves and the people under one slogan and one leadership

It is all right in normal times to advocate passionate selfhood and the resultant ego. But if it stands in the way of the greater good of the generality, its worship cannot be the supreme principle of social and political ethics. Hence it is better to bury it five fathoms deep and destroy its petty, nasty, lusty and jarring nature to be able to strategise collectively for desired results. The leadership is in the public gaze and people are not amused by watching their ego tussels while they have staked every thing for the rights' movement.

They discern the white light of purity of purpose has been dissipated in the distraction of several colours, the innocent kiss of love tainted with the petty lust for power and pelf. I appeal to them in the inimitable words of Ghalib.

At the same time our intelligentsia must shed off their absurd postures, cynical attitudes, nihilistic approaches, empty rebellion, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. They must engage themselves in a creative involvement with the rights movement before they become irrelevant to the society which has nourished them and to which they owe a great responsibility. Right now the role of a conscious agent eludes them. I appeal to them also in Ghalib's matchless verse:

(The world breaks and reforms and beauty assumes new patterns If the mountains remain unchanged (it does not Matter) you may consider yourself a voice without echo (but carry on!)

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